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# A CULTURAL HISTORY OF ASSAM (EARLY PERIOD)

VOLUME I

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## PREFACE

The early history of Assam has not been fully explored. Gait's well-known *A History of Assam* passes lightly over the early period, which is perhaps the most creative and the most significant in the history of the province. Assam receives only a casual treatment in Dr. H. C. Ray's *Dynastic History of Northern India* as also in Dr. R. G. Basak's *History of North-Eastern India*. The first attempt to treat the early history of the province systematically was that of the late Rai Bahadur K. L. Barua in his *Early History of Kāmarūpa*. In all these works, however, attention was solely given to reconstructing a political or dynastic history. Though Babu Nagendra Nath Vasu's *Social History of Kāmarūpa* contains a mass of unassorted information, it lacks in critical examination and historical perspective. Professor Banikanta Kakati's *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya* is an admirable introduction to the religious history of mediaeval Assam. All these works notable in themselves, do not portray a complete picture of the material, social, religious, aesthetic and cultural conditions of the people of early Assam. In this book, a modest attempt has therefore been made to supplement the labours of the previous writers by collecting relevant materials and putting them in their proper places to tell the cultural history of the country from the early period to the coming of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century. To complete the whole picture down to the 18th century, a second volume is under preparation. Though in the treatment of the political history the earlier works have been mainly followed new and supplementary informations brought to light since their publication have been incorporated. My indebtedness is indeed very great to Mahāmahopādhyāya Padmanatha Bhattacharya's *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, wherein are critically and carefully edited the copper-plate land-grants of the early kings of Assam.

Since the publication of the *Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvalī* researches in the early history of Assam have taken a new turn.

The major portion of the materials utilised in this book has been collected principally from inscriptions, contemporary literature, and travellers' accounts.

I have even taken into account the collateral evidences of the Mohammedan writers who visited the country during successive periods of her eventful history. I have also duly recognised the value of incidental facts relating to social life, customs, and religious beliefs embodied in two well-known Sanskrit texts, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra*. The Calcutta edition of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the Bombay edition of the *Yoginī Tantra* have been referred to. Early Assamese literature forms a veritable mine of information for the study of social and economic conditions of the land. Though these texts were written after the 13th century A.D., they preserve traditions of earlier times. It is for the first time that early Assamese literature has been drawn on to furnish materials for a history of the province and to give a comprehensive picture of the life and thought of the Assamese people. Old Assamese literature, though religious in tenor, and imaginative in outlook, contains a mass of information about earlier society like the mediaeval romances of Europe. In it lie scattered references to religious beliefs, social life, customs and manners of the people. The flowers and trees, birds and animals, rivers and mountains of the country have been mentioned in them. The size of the present work forbids the incorporation of all the materials that the author has been able to glean from these works : they will however be utilised in a second volume.

As described in the pages of this book, Assam treasures many relics of the past. In all the ancient sites of the province, ruins of old temples, monuments, forts, buildings and bridges lie scattered waiting to tell their secrets. Fortunately some of these ruins have now been noticed in the Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India. The evidences of these art expressions have also been taken into consideration in the preparation of the present volume.

It may be mentioned that Independence has awakened in us a sense of national consciousness and more people today are interested in the cultural stock-taking of our country and in assessing the values of our heritage as equipments for the future. A humble attempt has been made in this volume to trace the history of the growth and development of the Assamese people through several centuries with the hope that it may go in some way to reorient our cultural and national life.

No one other than myself however is more conscious of the limitations to labour under in writing a Cultural History of Assam at this stage of historical research in the province. Systematic investigations have not yet been carried out in various aspects of early Assamese life. In preparing this volume, I myself had to hunt out most of the information incorporated in it. As a pioneer work the book cannot be free from shortcomings both in the presentation of facts and in conclusions derived from them. For all these, I only crave the indulgence of the readers.

While the book was in the press, the price of paper went up very high ; so as a measure of economy some appendices and other additional materials had to be left out. For the same reason a bibliography of books consulted had also to be omitted. Acknowledgments of books and periodicals are however made either in the body of the text or in the foot-notes. It is to be regretted that in spite of best efforts it has not been possible to maintain rigid uniformity in the transliteration and spelling of personal and place names.

I have to express deep obligation to various individuals who have helped me in the compilation of this work. I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor K. de B. Codrington of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, who helped me in various ways when I worked under him for my Ph. D. degree of the University of London in 1945-47. My indebtedness is, however, much greater to Professor Banikanta Kakati, M.A., Ph.D. (Cal.), Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Gauhati University, who with great love and affection guided

me at every step of my work and helped me with illuminating informations and precious suggestions. He even allowed me to incorporate in the Appendix of this book two notable contributions of his on Place and Personal names in the Early Land Grants of Assam and Certain Austric-Sanskrit Word Correspondences. I am grateful to Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, M.A., B.L., Ph.D. (London) for drawing my attention to some points of interest. The publication of this book owes not a little to the care bestowed on me by our eminent physician Dr. Bhubaneswar Barooah. Immediately after the book was sent to the press, I suddenly fell ill and the printing had to be suspended for some time. That I could recover early and once again take up the printing of the book was owing to the attention of Dr. Barooah. Dr. Barooah's name, therefore will ever be gratefully associated with this publication.

I am also grateful to the Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University, Shri K. K. Handiqui, M.A., (Cal. et Oxon.), for offering me necessary facilities.

While I was working as a research student at the Calcutta University (1935-39) under the late Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Rai Bahadur Shri R. K. Handiqui, the well-known philanthropist of Assam and the late Sir Michael Keane, Governor of Assam (1932-1937), put me under great obligation by placing at my disposal funds towards the collection of a series of photographs of Assam sculptures which are now incorporated in this work. I express my heart-felt gratitude to these patrons.

I am indebted to Shri Maheswar Neog, M.A., Lecturer in Assamese, Gauhati University, for his tireless efforts in reading the proofs, to Shri Brajendranath Acharyya, M.A., Lecturer, Cotton College, Gauhati, who has checked the Sanskrit verses, to Shri Bhupendranath Chowdhury, M.A., for preparing a part of the manuscript, to Shri Jogeswar Sarma, M.A., Librarian, Gauhati University, for helping me in drawing up the Index. To Shri Praphulladatta Goswami,

M.A. and to Shri Satyendranath Sarma, M.A., both Lecturers of Gauhati University, I am grateful for assistance rendered in many ways.

Last, but far from the least, I have to mention Shri G. Srinivasachari, B.A., Proprietor, G. S. Press, Madras, for his courtesy and promptness in printing the book and in accommodating me in all matters of printing difficulties.

Gauhati University

Gauhati

1951'

BIRINCHI KUMAR BARUA

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>A.B.O.R.I.</b>	.. Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona.
<b>A.P.M.</b>	.. Assam Provincial Museum, Gauhati.
<b>A.R.A.S.I.</b>	.. Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India.
<b>A.S.M. (M.A.S.I.)</b>	.. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.
<b>As. Res.</b>	.. Asiatic Researches.
<b>C.I.J.</b>	.. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
<b>C.R.</b>	.. Calcutta Review.
<b>E.I.</b>	.. Epigraphia Indica.
<b>E.R.E.</b>	.. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
<b>G.J.</b>	.. Geographical Journal, London
<b>I.A.</b>	.. Indian Antiquary.
<b>I.C.</b>	.. Indian Culture.
<b>I.H.Q.</b>	.. Indian Historical Quarterly.
<b>Ind. Alt.</b>	.. Indische Altertumskunde.
<b>J.A.R.S.</b>	.. Journal of the Assam Research Society.
<b>J.A.S.B.</b>	.. Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bengal.
<b>J.ProA.S.B.</b>	.. Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society. Bengal.
<b>J.A.</b>	.. Journal of Arts, London.
<b>J.B.O.R.S.</b>	.. Journal of the Bihar Orissa Research Society
<b>J.D.L.</b>	.. Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University.
<b>J.I.H.</b>	.. Journal of Indian History, Madras.
<b>J.I.S.O.A.</b>	.. Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Arts, Calcutta.
<b>J.O.R.</b>	.. Journal of Oriental Research, Madras.
<b>J.R.A.I.</b>	.. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London.
<b>J.R.A.S.B.</b>	.. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.
<b>J.R.G.S.</b>	.. Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, London.
<b>J.S.I.</b>	.. Journal of the Society of Arts.
<b>J.S.O.A.</b>	.. Journal of the Society of the Oriental Art, Calcutta.
<b>J.R.A.S.</b>	.. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London.
<b>J.U.G.</b>	.. Journal of the University of Gauhati.
<b>J.R.S.A.</b>	.. Journal of the Royal Society of Arts, London
<b>K.A.C.V.</b>	.. Dr. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar Commemoration Volume, Madras, 1936.
<b>K.P.</b>	.. Kālikī Purāṇa.
<b>K.S.</b>	.. Kāmarūpa Sasanāvali.
<b>M.I.</b>	.. Man in India, Ranchi.
<b>N.I.A.</b>	.. New Indian Antiquary.
<b>R.A.S.I.</b>	.. Report of the Archaeological Survey of India.
<b>Rupam.</b>	.. An Illustrated Quarterly Journal of Oriental Art, chiefly Indian, Calcutta.
<b>V.P.</b>	.. Viṣṇu Purāṇa
<b>Y.T.</b>	.. Yoginī Tantra.

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# A CULTURAL HISTORY OF ASSAM

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

##### 1. Location

Assam is the frontier province of India on the north-east. The boundaries of Assam lie between latitudes 28° 18' and 24° North and longitudes 89° 46' and 97° 4' East. It contains at present an area of 54,000 square miles, of which a little over 24,000 square miles constitute the plain districts, 19,500 the southern hill tracts and the rest the tribal hill tracts to the north.

On three sides, the province is shut in by great mountain ranges, inhabited by people, mostly of Mongolian stock. To the north lie the Himalayan regions of Bhutan and Tibet. Below the high mountains is a range of sub-Himalayan hills, inhabited to the west by small races of Blutia origin, and further eastward by Tibeto-Burman tribes, Akas, Dasas, Miris, Abors, and Mishmis. To the north-east lie the Mishmi Hills, curving round the head of the Brahmaputra Valley. With reference to these northern frontier tracts, it is noteworthy that the international boundary between Assam and Tibet has never been defined. However, in 1914 a tentative agreement was reached, embodying a line on the map called the McMahon Line.<sup>1</sup> Continuing to the east is the Patkai Range, which defines the western boundary of Ava, the intervening ranges being inhabited chiefly by various tribes of Nagas, and the native state of Manipur. Though the great natural boundary between Assam and Burma consists of a tangled mass of mountains whose summits rise to 12,000 ft., yet the geographical barriers are not insuperable; the passes crossing these mountainous regions are actually not very difficult, and inter-communication has been plentiful and constant. To the south lie the Lushai Hills, Hill Tippera, and the Bengal Districts of Mymensingh and Rangpur. Here, also, is the native state of Cooch Behar, which was once an integral part of Kāmarūpa (Assam).

1. Robert Reid: The Excluded Area of Assam, G.J., CIII, pp. 19-23;  
Mills: The Assam Burma Frontier, *Ibid.*, LXVII, pp. 289-301.

Assam is, therefore, divided physically into two main parts, the highlands of the frontier tracts to the north and east, and the plains below. The plains consist of the great river valley of the Brahmaputra. The area of the Brahmaputra Valley is 24,283 square miles. Between the valley lie the broken hills of the Assam Range comprising the administrative districts of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the North-Cachar Hills (sub-division), and the Naga Hills. Cachar was originally an independent state. It came under British possession in 1830, and was subsequently attached to Assam as an administrative unit.<sup>2</sup>

Through the heart of the province runs the great river called in Sanskrit the Brahmaputra or Śrī Lauhitya.<sup>3</sup> In Assamese it is called Lohit or Luit. It enters the north-eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi Hills and turning nearly due west, passes through all the districts of north Assam. It is the chief artery and highway of Assam. For generations the Assamese have watered their fields with its life-giving floods and drunk of its blessed water; their whole history and culture are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra.<sup>4</sup>

The Brahmaputra Valley comprises the modern districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, and the Frontier Tracts of Balipara and Sadiya. It consists of a wide alluvial plain, about 450 miles in length, with an average breadth of about 50 miles, lying almost east and west in its lower portion, but in its upper half trending somewhat to the north-east. The lower ranges of the Himalayas rise abruptly from the plains; to the south is the elevated plateau, or, rather succession of plateaus, called the Assam Range, irregularly broken at its eastern and western extremities, and along its northern face, but in its central portion, from the eastern border of the Garo Hills to the water-

2. Gait, p. 303 ff; Pemberton: *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 189-210. Historically Sylhet was never a part of Assam. Its existence as a district of Assam was primarily for administrative purposes and only dated from 1874 (Gait, pp. 326, 338). Gupta, however, contends that during 700 A.D. Sylhet was included in Assam; vide Identification of Brahmo-tiara *I.H.Q.*, VII, pp. 743 ff; Also *H.I.*, XII, pp. 67 ff; *K.S.*, pp. 4 ff., Bhattachari, *J.A.S.B.*, 1935, pp. 419 ff.

3. Hamilton: *Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindostan, and the Adjacent Countries*, II, pp. 741 ff; Noel Williams: The Lohit Brahmaputra, etc. *G.J.* XXXIV, pp. 363-383; Sven Hedin: *Trans-Himalaya*, II, pp. 96 ff.

4. The legendary account of the origin of the Brahmaputra is given at length in the *Kālikā Purāna*, Ch. 82.

shed of the Dhansiri forming a region of table-land and rolling uplands. The broadest part of the valley is where the river divides the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, below which the isolated block of the Mikir Hills on the south (a mass of mountains over 3,000 square miles in area cut off from the main Assam Range by the valley of the Dhansiri, Langpher and Jamuna rivers), and the projecting group of the Dafla Hills to the north, suddenly contract it. Forty miles lower down it widens out. At the lower end of the Nowgong district it is again restricted by the Khasi Hills, among the spurs of which the river makes its way through Gauhati. Once again, it is almost completely shut in just to the west of that town, below the temple-crowned hill of Nilācala or Kāmākhyā, where it is only some 800 yards broad. Beyond this point the hills recede again and the valley widens as far as Goalpara, situated on a spur of the Garo Hills. Here at its confluence with the Manah, between the rocks of Jogighopa and Pagla Tek is the "Gate of Assam". Immediately beyond this point the valley again widens, and at Dhubri finally opens out into the great delta of Bengal.<sup>5</sup>

As has been pointed out, the Brahmaputra Valley is a compact geographical unit. It will be seen in the next chapter that Assam proper, which at present is conterminous only with the six districts of the great valley, in early times included the whole of Eastern Bengal down to the sea, as well as a part of Bihar, and the rugged mountains of Bhutan.<sup>6</sup>

Assam has always held a distinct and independent political existence, though her political frontiers have advanced or receded according to her prosperity, and at times her area varied greatly from what it is today. It must, however, be noted that although the political boundaries of the country have changed from age to age, its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in such a manner as to ensure that it retained its cultural identity through ages. The unbroken unity of its history is the result of the geographical unity of the area of the Brahmaputra Valley which is the heart of Assam.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Assam should be racially and linguistically homogeneous; that is to say, its inhabitants form a distinct entity among the peoples of India, united by a common tongue, an Aryan dialect of great antiquity. Even in the early

5. Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam, pp. I ff.; Lyall: The Province of Assam, J.S.A., LI, 1903, pp. 612-636.

6. E.R.E. II, p. 132.

part of the seventh century, Hiuen Tsiang was able to report that the language of Assam differed a little from that of Mid-India.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Origin of the Name Assam

The modern name of the province, Assam is actually of quite recent origin. It is connected with the Shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D., and who were known as Ahoms. The tradition of the Ahoms, themselves, is that the present name is derived from *Asama* in the sense of "unequalled" or "peerless". They say that this was the term applied to them at the time of their invasion of the valley by the local tribes, in token of their admiration of the way in which the Ahom king first conquered and then conciliated them.<sup>8</sup> Kakati suggests that "*Asama*", "peerless", may be a latter-day Sanskritisation of an earlier form, "*Achām*". In *Tāi* √*Chām* means, "to be defeated". With the Assamese prefix *ā*, *Āsām* would mean "undefeated", "conquerors". If this is its origin, from the people, the name was subsequently applied to the country.<sup>9</sup> However, another derivation has been suggested. "The name (*Āsām*)", observed Baden-Powell, "is most probably traceable to (the Boro) *Hā-com* the low or level country."<sup>10</sup> In this case, it was the country which gave its name to the people.

## 3. People

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were the *Kirātas*, *Cinas* and other primitive tribes commonly designated as *Mlechhas* and *Asuras*. The *Mahābhārata* refers to the army of Bhagadatta composed of *Cina* and *Kirāta* soldiers who glittered like gold: *tasya cīnaiḥ kirātaiseśa kāñcanairiva samvṛtāni babhan balam*.<sup>11</sup> The *Cinas* were the Chinese people who penetrated into Assam long before the Christian era. In chapter IV we have traced the various routes through which these people came to Assam. *Kirāta* according to the *Śāṅhitās* is a name applied to a people living in the caves (*guhā*) of the mountain as it appears clearly from the dedication of the *Kirāta* to the caves in the *Vājasaneyi Śāṅhitā* and

7. Watters: *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, II, p. 186.

8. Gait: *A History of Assam*, pp. 245-246.

9. *Assamese; Its Formation and Development*, pp. 1-3; B. K. Barua. A Note on the word *Asama*, J.A.R.S., Vol. II (1935), pp. 102-4.

10. *The Indian Village Community*, p. 135.

11. *Udyoga*, XVIII, 584-5, Salator: *The Wild Tribes in Indian History*, pp. 13-37; Law: *Tribes in Ancient India*, pp. 282-83.

from the reference in the *Atharvaveda* to a Kirāta girl (*Kairātikā*).<sup>12</sup> In the *Purāṇas* Kirātas are designated "foresters", "barbarians", "mountaineers"<sup>13</sup> appellations which are understood as referring to the inhabitants of the mountains of eastern India. In another *Purāṇa*, they are described as "shepherds living on hills to the north of Bengal".<sup>14</sup> In the *Mahābhārata* the Kirātas are placed around the Brahmaputra. They are undoubtedly the same people mentioned by *Periplus*, Ptolemy and other early writers as Cirrhadoe. The Kirātas who possess a tract of hilly country in the Morung, to the west of Sikkim, and situated between Nepal and Bhutan, appear to be descendants of the ancient Kirātas. Lessen takes them to belong to Bhoṭa tribe.<sup>15</sup> In the present context the word appears to denote all the races with the Mongolian type of features along the eastern limits of India. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* describes these original inhabitants of Assam as Kirātas with shaven heads and yellow skins. They were strong, ferocious ignorant and addicted to meat and drink.<sup>16</sup>

Linguistic evidences,<sup>17</sup> popular customs and some of the place-names of the province also indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Assam were speakers of the Indo-Chinese language of the Mon-Khmer family<sup>18</sup> which has been characterised by Schiindt as the Austric family of languages. The date when the Austric speakers began to filter into Assam is not known, but it must have taken place several hundred years B.C. and certainly long anterior to the advent of the Aryans from the west.<sup>19</sup> It is not easy to say how much the Austric speaking Mongolian peoples contributed to the racial make-up of Assam; but it is evident that their culture still survives in many existing institutions, customs and manners of the Assamese people. A glance at the map of Assam will show

12. *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, Vol. I, p. 157-8.

13. *Vishnu Purāṇa* (Tr.) pp. 175, 190.

14. Wilford: *Essay on the Sacred Isles of the West, As Res.* Vol. VIII. p. 38.

15. *Ind. Alt.* I, pp. 185, 391, 411, 444, 448. *Ancient India as described by Ptolemy*, pp. 191-4, 219-221.

16. 39/104.

17. *Assamese : Its Formation and Development* pp. 32-47

18. Hutton, however finds traces of a Negrito substratum in the population of the inaccessible areas between Assam and Burma though it is not in Assam proper. *Census Report, India, 1931*, p. 443. A Negrito substratum in the Population of Assam. *Man in India*, VII, pp. 257, 262. *Races of Further India*. *Ibid.* XII, pp. 1-18.

19. *Indo-Aryan and Hindi*, p. 39.

how many places and river names bear witness to an Austric substratum.

The next wave of Indo-Chinese invasion is represented by the various peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. The original home of these speakers was in north-west China near the Yangtse-kiang and the Hwang-ho rivers. From these they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra and the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy and entered India and Burma. The swarm which came to Assam proceeded down to the great bend of the river Brahmaputra near Dhubri. From there some of them went to the south and occupied first the Garo Hills and the state of Hill Tippera. Others appear to have ascended the valley of the Kapili and the neighbouring streams into the hilly country of North Cachar, but the mountainous tract between it and the Garo Hills now known as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, they failed to occupy, and it ever remained a home of the Mon-Khmer speaking people. Other members of this Tibeto-Burman horde halted at the head of the Brahmaputra Valley and turned south. They took possession of the Naga Hills and became the ancestors of that confused sample-bag tribes whose speeches are classed as the Naga-group. Another of the swarms that settled in the upper basins of the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy gradually advanced towards the south of Assam and colonised in the Lushai, Cachar and even in some parts of Manipur and Naga Hills.<sup>20</sup> The most important group of tribes of the Tibeto-Burman race known as Bodo forms the numerous and important section of the non-Aryan peoples of Assam. The Bodo group of tribes includes the Koc, the Kachārī, the Lālung, the Dimāchā, the Gāro, the Rābhā, the Tipurā, the Chutiyā and the Marāñ. The Bodo people who live to the west of the present Kamrup district are called Mec by their Hindu neighbours. This word is probably a corruption of Sanskrit *mleccha*. Those of them who live in and to the west of the district of Kamrup are called Kāchārī or Kachārī. Various guesses have been made about the origin of the word Kachārī but it seems that the word is connected with Sanskrit *kakṣāta*, a hypothetical formation paralleled to Sanskrit *Kirāta*.<sup>21</sup>

Linguistic evidence shows that at one time the Bodo people extended over the whole of the present province west of Manipur and the Naga Hills, excepting only the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In fact, they have given their own names to many of the most pro-

20. *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. I.

21. *Assamese; Its Formation and Development*, p. 47.

minent features of the province. The Bodos built their colonies near about streams and so most of the river names in eastern Assam are of Bodo origin. The Bodo equivalent for water is *di* (in the hills and in Eastern Assam). They even rechristened a river name of earlier Austric origin by prefixing it by their own equivalent for water, e. g. *Di-hong*, the name of a river, where Bodo *di* was placed before Austric *hong* (water), perhaps the name of the river in olden times.

The Bodos built strong kingdoms and with various fortunes and under various tribal names—the Chutiyā, the Kachāri, the Koc, etc., held sway over one or another part of Assam during different historical times. During the course of centuries the Bodos suffered much from external pressure. They were hemmed in from the east by the Ahoms of the great Tāi race and from the west by the Aryans.<sup>22</sup>

The Tāis or Shans<sup>23</sup> first appeared in history in Yun-nan and from thence they migrated into upper Burma. In the 6th century A.D. they migrated from the mountains of Southern Yun-nan into the valley of the Sheweli and the adjacent regions. In the 13th century one of their tribes, the Ahoms overran and conquered Assam itself, giving their name to the country. Other Shan tribes who followed the Ahoms were the Khāmtis, Phākiyāls, Narās and Aitoniyās, who mostly inhabit the eastern part of Assam.

The Tibeto-Burmans and the Shans today constitute the bulk of the population of the province, valleys as well as hills. Risley rightly remarks that the Assamese are unmistakably Mongoloid.<sup>24</sup> Elwin considers them a rather modified Mongoloid with a dolichocephalic or long head but with the typical flat nose, high cheek bones and oblique slit-eyes.<sup>25</sup>

At what period of history the Aryan speakers came into the valley of the Brahmaputra we cannot say. But there is hardly any doubt that they arrived at a fairly early period<sup>26</sup> either as the result of invasion or by means of peaceful penetration. Assam's early contact with Aryan India is revealed by references

22. Gait, pp. 46 ff.

23. The Shans call themselves Dai or Tai, meaning "ourselves", equivalent to the "We" group in meaning of Dr. Li Chi's classification of peoples: *The Formation of the Chinese People*.

24. *The People of India*. Second edition, p. 42.

25. *The Aboriginals*, p. 5.

26. Diksitar: *Aryanisation of East India (Assam)* I. II. Q. XXI, pp.29-33.

in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. In the Aryanisation of the province the Narakā legend also bears special significance. In a subsequent chapter it has been shown how in the early centuries of the Christian era high-class Aryans, such as Brāhmaṇas, Kāyasthas and Kalitās came and settled in Assam. The Nidhanpur Copper Plate grant also records that king Bhūtivarman (6th century A.D.) granted special Agrahāra settlements to more than two hundred Brāhmaṇas of various gotras and *vedaśūkhās* for promotion of Vedic religion and culture. Traces of early Aryan settlements of the Kalitās are found in the Sadiya tract of eastern Assam.<sup>27</sup> They not only established Aryan settlements with their own people but brought the earlier inhabitants to their fold by giving them Aryan religion, rites and language. In this process of Aryanisation even tribes' names were changed to caste names. Thus the Koc which was originally used to designate a tribe has become in later years the name of a recognised Aryan caste into which are absorbed converts from the Kachārī, the Lālung, the Mikir and other original tribes.<sup>28</sup>

The Aryan influence became so widespread, and penetrating that even minor Vedic customs and rituals became deep-rooted in the life of the common people. For instance, the Vedic custom of worship of Indra by setting up *Indradhvaja* still survives in Assam in the popular festival of *Bhatheli* (*Bha-sthali*).<sup>29</sup> The existing practice of animal sacrifice by strangling on the *Siva caturdashi* day is also a Vedic survival.<sup>30</sup> It is significant that the Assamese woman's undergarment *mekhelā* is a phonetic variation of *mekhalā* which was a girdle for woman or *Brahmacārī* in Vedic times.<sup>31</sup> But the greatest cultural influence of the Aryans which also brought unity among the diverse tribes and races of the province however, was the language. Sanskrit not only became the language of the court, it also became the medium of expression for poets, philosophers and preachers. Modern Assamese as an Aryan speech developed out of the Sanskrit as early as the 10th century A.D.

27. *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*, pp. 59-64

28. *Census of India*, 1891, Assam, pp. 83-84.

29. S. C. Goswami, *J.A.R.S.*, Vol. X, pp. 26-33.

30. The word used in this connection in the *Gṛhya Sūtras* is *Sampūrṇayavanti* which means killing by suffocation. *Vanamāli Vedāntatirtha: The Gṛhyasūtras of Gobhila*, p. 144, fn. 23.

31. *Assamese Grammar and Origin of the Assamese Language*, Intro. xxix-xxx, xvi.

It should also be noted that the Aryan speakers migrated to Assam mostly from *Madhyadeśa* or Mid-India. A succession of influences, ideas and cultures entered Assam down to the mediæval period through *Madhyadeśa*. Tradition bears testimony to the fact that the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas came to Assam from Videha (Mithilā) and Kanauj. Geographically this had to be so, for in the early times, Assam's western boundary extended to the river Kausīka in Bihar<sup>22</sup> and the Kāmarūpas were included in the list of the *prācya* peoples (easterners) along with Paundras, Odras, Anigas, Varigas and Gauḍas.<sup>23</sup>

Anthropometric researches have not been carried out in Assam. So nothing can be said about the ethnic affinity of these Aryan speakers. It is nevertheless certain that before their arrival in the valley of the Brahmaputra these speakers had lost purity of Nordic blood and became almost a mixed race.

## II. EARLY GEOGRAPHY: LITERARY TRADITION

### 1. *Prāgjyotiṣa*

Assam is a part of the country known in ancient times as *Prāgjyotiṣa*. By this name the country was known in the great epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, as well as in some of the principal *Purāṇas*.

"*Prāgjyotiṣa* was a famous kingdom in early times and is often mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. The references to it how-

32. The Kusi river today flows westward of the Bhagalpur district, Bihar. But it should be noted that the main channel of the Kusi river once oscillated over vast tracts of country from the Brahmaputra to the Gandak river. Indeed, the river is remarkable for its constant westwardly movement. Both Buchanan and Hunter are of opinion that the Kusi of remote times went eastward to meet the Brahmaputra. Hunter further states that the Kusi formerly joined the Karatoya, and marked an ethnic frontier forming a natural barrier. Hunter: *Statistical Account of Bengal, Purneah*; Martin: *Eastern India*, III, p. 15; Shillingford: On changes in the course of the Kusi river and probable dangers arising from them. *J.A.S.B.*, LXIV., PL I. pp. 1-24.

Since the discovery of the Nidhanpur Plates a controversy is going on regarding the identification of the river Kausiki. The following contributions are worth mentioning: Barua: Kausika and Kausiara, *I.E.* I, pp. 421-432 Kausika or Kausiki, *Ibid.* II, pp. 139-40. Kausiki and Kausiara, *Ibid.* p. 171; Bhattacharya: Kausiki and Kausiara, *I. E.* II, pp. 167-70; Bhattachari: Location of the land granted by the Nidhanpur Grant of Bhaskaravarma of Kamrup, *J.A.S.B.*, 1935, p. 419, ff.

33. *Arya Manjuśri Mūlakalpa*.

ever, are rather perplexing for in some passages it is called a Mleccha kingdom ruled over by king Bhagadatta who is always spoken of in respectful and even eulogistic terms (*Sabhā* : *Udyoga*; and *Karṇa*) and in other passages it is called a Dānava or Asura kingdom ruled over by the demons Naraka and Muru (*Vana* ; *Udyoga* ; Hari V. ; *Rāmāyaṇa*) while in some other passages the allusion seem mixed, e.g. *Sabhā* seems to call Bhagadatta a Yavana. The second class of passages occur I believe only in descriptions of Krishna's exploits, they are spoilt by hyperbolical laudation and are probably later than the first class. Prāgjyotiṣa was placed in the North region (*Sabhā* ; *Vana*) but was also considered to be in the East as in the text here. North of it seemingly lay tracts called Antargiri, Vahirgiri and Upagiri (*Sabhā*) which appear to be the lower slopes of the Himalayas and the Terai; and it was close to the mountains for Bhagadatta is called Sailalaya (*Strī*). It bordered on the Kiratas and Cinas for they formed his retinue (*Sabhā*, *Udyoga*). He also drew his troops from among the people who dwelt in the marshy regions near the sea, Sāgarānūpa (*Sabhā*, *Karṇa*) and it is even said he dwelt at the Eastern Ocean (*Udyoga*); these marshy regions can only be the alluvial tracts and islands near the mouths of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra as they existed anciently. These data indicate that Prāgjyotiṣa comprised the whole of North Bengal proper.<sup>34</sup> The Raghu *Vamśa* places it seemingly beyond the Brahmaputra (III. 81), but Kalidāsa was a little uncertain in distant geography. Its capital was called Prāg-jyotiṣa also. Although the people were Mlechas the *Rāmāyaṇa* ascribes the founding of this kingdom to Amūrtarajas, one of the four sons of a great king Kuṣa (Ādi). Amūrtarajas as the name is generally written in the *Mahābhārata* is mentioned there simply as father of the famous king Gaya (*Vana* : *Drona*).<sup>35</sup>

The Mārkandeya *Purāṇa* places Prāgjyotiṣa on the face of the tortoise.<sup>36</sup> It is also mentioned in the list of the peoples of the east as given by Varāhamihira in the *Bṛhat Samhitā*.<sup>37</sup> The same statement is found in the *Matsya*<sup>38</sup> and the *Brahmāṇḍa*<sup>39</sup> *Purāṇas*. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* refers to Prāgjyotiṣa when recounting the

34. B. C. Law: Prāgjyotiṣa, *Journal of the U. P. History Soc.*, Vol. XVIII, part I-II, pp. 43 ff.

35. *Mārkandeya Purāṇa* (Tr.), pp. 328, 329

36. Kūrmavibhāga, ch. 58.

37. Ch. XIV, V. 6; Ch. XVI.

38. Ch. 114, V. 45.

39. Bha. 16.

story of Naraka.<sup>40</sup> Bharata also while referring to the countries where the Odra-Māgadhi literary style was prevalent mentions Prāgjyotiṣa with the adjoining countries of the east; prāgjyotiṣāḥ pulindāśca, vaidehāstāmīraliptakāḥ prācyā prabṛtayaścāira yuṣyanti hyodra-māgadhim.<sup>41</sup> The Kāvyamīmāṃsā of Rājaśekhara also places Prāgjyotiṣa, Tāmraliptaka and the Puṇḍra countries in the east.<sup>42</sup>

The Kālikā Purāṇa, a work of the 10th century A.D.,<sup>42a</sup> says, "Formerly Brahmā staying here created the stars; so the city is called Prāgjyotiṣapura a city equal to the city of Indra".<sup>43</sup> This etymological explanation given by the Kālikā Purāṇa has been followed by the historians of Assam. Gait writes, "Prāg means former or eastern and jyotiṣa a star, astrology, shining. Prāgjyotiṣapura may be taken to mean the City of Eastern Astrology. The name is interesting in connection with the reputation which the country has always held as a land of magic and incantation and with the view that it was in Assam that the Tantrik form of Hinduism originated". Barua accepts the etymology but reads it in a different connotation. "It is significant that to the immediate east of the town of Gauhati there is a temple on the crest of a hill known as Cīrācalā, and this temple is dedicated to the Navagrahas or the nine planets. It is probable that this temple is the origin of the name Prāgjyotiṣapura".<sup>44</sup> Prāgjyotiṣa according to Dr. Kakati seems to be connected with topographical features of the land rather than with any religious cult.<sup>45</sup> Earlier references clearly illustrate that Prāgjyotiṣa or Prāgjyotiṣapura was on an extensive hill. This topographical feature of Prāgjyotiṣa as described in the earlier texts correspond to an Austric formation like Pagar-juh (*jo*)-tic (*c' = ch*), meaning a region of extensive high hills. Thus Prāgjyotiṣa may be a Sanskritisation of a non-Aryan formation.<sup>46</sup>

40. Bk. XII.

41. Nātyasāstra, Ch. XIV, V. 45-47.

42. Ch. 17.

42a. Gode puts the date before 1000 A.D. J.O.R., V, pp. 289-294. R. C. Hazra holds that the present Kālikā Purāṇa is a work quite different from an earlier work of that name mentioned in the list of the eighteen Upa-Purāṇas which was compiled between 650 A.D. to 900 A.D. ABORI, XXII, Pl-23.

43. 39/126.

44. History of Assam, p. 15.

45. Early History of Kāmarūpa, p. 13.

46. The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya, p. 6.

## 2. Kāmarūpa

It has been described in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* that immediately after Naraka of Mithila became king and was placed in charge of the goddess Kūmākhya, the name of the land was changed from Prāgjyotiṣa to Kāmarūpa. The term Kāmarūpa (Kāmākhya) symbolised a new cult, and in exaltation of it the land itself was rechristened.<sup>47</sup> The earliest epigraphic reference to Kāmarūpa is however to be found in the well-known Allahabad inscriptions of Samudragupta where Kāmarūpa is mentioned as a frontier territory.<sup>48</sup> In classical Sanskrit literature Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa occur side by side for instance, in Kālidāsa. In the story of Raghu's *dīvijaya* as given in the *Raghuvamśa* the hero first came to Prāgjyotiṣa and then to Kāmarūpa after having crossed the Lauhitya.<sup>49</sup> The king of Kāmarūpa worshipped Raghu's feet on a golden foot-stool as if they were his presiding deity with presents of jewels instead of flowers. Yādavaprakāśa (c. 1000 A.D.) in his *Vaijayantī* also mentions Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa; Prāgjyotiṣa Kāmarūpa prāgjōlika.<sup>50</sup> Rājaśekhara (c. 900 A.D.) refers to Prāgjyotiṣa as a country and Kāmarūpa as a mountain.<sup>51</sup> The Jaina lexicographer Hemacandra (c. 1200 A.D.) says, "the Prāgjyotiṣas are the Kāmarūpas".<sup>52</sup> Puruṣottama also states that Prāgjyotiṣa is Kāmarūpa.<sup>53</sup> Yaśodhara (c. 1300 A.D.) the author of the *Jayamāṅgalā* commentary on the *Kāmasūtra*, places Kāmarūpa as a country of the eastern region: *gaudā kāmarupakāḥ prācyā-viśeṣāḥ*.<sup>54</sup> The Manjuśrī Mūlakalpa puts it near the Himalayas.<sup>55</sup>

In some of the later *Purāṇas* the name appears in a different context. The *Śiva Purāṇa* states that in Sahyādri there was a country named Kāmarūpa which was conquered by a Rākṣasa named Bhīma.<sup>56</sup> Both *Vāyu*<sup>57</sup> and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas*<sup>58</sup> refer-

47. *The Mother Goddess Kūmākhya*, p. 6.

48. *C.J.J.*, III.

49. IV, 81, 83. VII, 17.

50. D. C. Ganguly: *Yādavaprakāśa* on the ancient geography of India, *I.H.Q.* XIX, pp. 214 ff.

51. *Kāvya Mimāṃsa*, p. 93.

52. *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, p. 381.

53. *Trīkāṇḍa*, p. 93.

54. *Kāmasūtra*, p. 225.

55. *An Imperial History of India*, p. 32.

56. Ch. XXXXVIII.

57. Ch. XXXX.

58. Ch. XXXXIV.

ring to the peaks of the mountain Devakūṭa and their dwellers, mention the Kāmarūpī rākṣasas.

A fairly detailed account of the topography of the country is to be found in the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Yognī Tantra (c. 1600 A.D.), both the works being devoted to the religious history of mediæval Assam. The Kālikā Purāṇa says that Kāmarūpa is to the east of the Karatoyā river.<sup>59</sup> According to the Yognī Tantra the country lying to the east of Karatoyā as far as Dikkaravāsinī is called Kāmarūpa. It is triangular in shape (*trikoṇā-kūram*).<sup>60</sup> and a hundred *yojanas* in length, spreading over an area of thirty *yojanas* (*triṁśadyojanavistirṇam dīrgheṇa śatayojanam*).<sup>61</sup> The Viṣṇu Purāṇa also stated that the country extended around the temple of Kāmarūpa (which was in the centre of Kāmarūpa) in all directions for 100 *yojanas*.

The Yognī Tantra traces the frontiers of Kāmarūpa thus :—

nepālasya kāñcanāndriy brahmaputrasya saṅgamam  
karatoyām samārabhyā yāvad dikkaravāsinīm  
uttarasyām kañjagirih karatoyā tu paścime  
tīrthaśreṣṭhā dīksunādī pūrvasyāmp girikanyake  
dakṣine brahmaputrasya lākṣāyāḥ saṅgamāvadhi  
kāmarūpa iti khyātāḥ sarvaśāstreṣu niścitaḥ||<sup>62</sup>

"From the mountains Kāñcana in Nepal up to the confluence of the Brahmaputra, from the Karatoyā to Dikkaravāsinī the northern limit is the mount Kañja, in the west the Karatoyā, in the east the Dīksu, O daughter of the mountains ! in the south the confluence of the Lākṣā with the Brahmaputra. This is the territory which all treatises call by the name of Kāmarūpa". Thus Kāmarūpa included roughly the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur and Cooch Behar.<sup>63</sup>

A later Sanskrit work called *Haragaurīsaṁvāda* divides Kāmarūpa into four *pīthas* with clearly marked river boundaries ; viz. (1) Ratnapīṭha, between the Karatoyā and Svarṇakoṣa,

59. Ch. LXXVIII 7. The Karatoyā was once a large and sacred river which was known to have flowed through the northern part of modern Bengal and is referred to in the Tīrthayātrā section of the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata. It is also said that at the wedding of Śiva and Pārvati, the water which was poured upon their hands, fell to the ground, and became the river Karatoyā, from Kara, the hand, and toyā, water.

60. Ch. XI, 21 ft.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Ch. XI, 16-18.

63. Galt, p. 11.

(2) Kāmapiṭha, between the Svarṇakoṣa and the Kapili, (3) Svarṇapiṭha, between the Puṣpikā and the Bhairavī; (4) Saumāra, between the Bhairavī and the Dikrang river.<sup>64</sup>

According to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang who visited the court of Bhāskaravarman in 643 A.D. the country was more than a myraid li or 1667 miles in circuit.<sup>65</sup> The pilgrim travelled from Pun-na-sa-tan-na (Puṇḍravardhana) on the east more than 900 li, or 150 miles; crossed a large river and reached Kia-no-leu-po (Kāmarūpa). T'ang-Shu refers to this large river as Kalo-tu, by which was probably intended the Karatoyā.<sup>66</sup> The pilgrim says that to the east of Kāmarūpa was a series of hills and hillocks without any principal city stretching to south-western China.

In the T'ang-Shu, Kāmarūpa is described as being 1600 li to the west of Upper Burma beyond the black mountains. It was situated in Eastern India, 600 li to the south-east of Puṇḍravardhana (North Bengal) with the river Kalatu between the two countries.

The name Kāmarūpa according to the Puranic legends is associated with Kāmadeva, the god of love. It is here that Kāma was sent by the gods to put an end to Siva's mourning after the death of his consort and to awaken in him again the passion of creation. He was burnt to ashes by the angry glance of the great god, but later recovered his original form (*rūpa*), hence the name Kāmarūpa. During the mediæval period Kāmarūpa became a centre of Tāntrik worship and came to be considered a most sacred place, especially the temple of Kāmākhyā where the Devī was adored. This worship of the goddess and the very names of Kāmākhyā and Kāmarūpa have led Dr. Kakati to consider that the cult was probably derived from some pre-Aryan divinity. He further connects Kāmarūpa with such Austric formations as Kāmrū or Kāmrut which in Santali is a name for a lesser divinity.<sup>67</sup> The term Kāmarū or Kāmrū as alternative form of Kāmarūpa is attested in the Buddhist *Caryās* and also in *Hara-gaurīsamvāda*.

64. *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*, p. 8.

65. Watters: Op. Cit., Vol. II, p. 187.

66. Watters identifies it wrongly with the Brahmaputra.

67. *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, pp. 53-54.

## CHAPTER II

### A SKETCH OF POLITICAL HISTORY

#### 1. Traditional Kings

According to tradition, the earlier kings of Assam belonged to non-Aryan tribes, such as Dānavas and Asuras. The name of the earliest ruler as handed down by tradition was Mahiranga Dānava. He was followed by Hāṭakāsura, Sambāsura, Ratnāsura and Ghaṭakāsura. Ghaṭakā was supplanted by a prince from Videha named Naraka.<sup>1</sup> Naraka is mentioned both in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in the *Mahābhārata*. *Harivamṣa* and the *Kālikā Purāṇa* have also detailed the life and career of Naraka. Naraka was born to Bhūmi (Mother Earth) by Viṣṇu and the child was deposited on the sacrificial ground of king Janaka, its head being placed on the skull of a dead man. Janaka brought up the child in his court along with the royal princes till he was sixteen years old. Mother Earth impersonated herself as a nurse named Kātyāyani and looked to the child's upbringing. Naraka excelled the royal princes in the arts of war and peace, and this frightened Janaka. He had misapprehension that this child would one day wrest his kingdom from his sons and usurp the throne. One day the nurse Kātyāyani overheard certain confidential discussions between Janaka and his queen Sumati relating to the future of Naraka. Kātyāyani scented trouble and determined to remove Naraka from the court at the earliest moment. Kātyāyani pretended to go out on a pilgrimage to the Ganges and asked Naraka to escort her. Naraka agreed subject to his father Janaka's permission. Kātyāyani replied that Janaka was not his father. If Naraka only accompanied her to the river banks, he would meet his real father. Janaka was only his foster-father and would not allow him any share in his kingdom. Both mother and son slipped out of Janaka's court and came to the bank of the Ganges, Naraka learnt the story of his birth and came to recognise his putative father. They came by water to Prāgjyotiṣa accompanied by Viṣṇu. Naraka conquered the country from the Kirātas and was installed as king by Viṣṇu. At first Naraka was pious and ruled

1. The legendary account is related, in more detail, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Harivamṣa*; but still more fully narrated in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*.

his country righteously. Later on he became friendly with Bāna, king of Sonitapura, and grew irreligious and presumptuous. Possessed by demoniac ideas (*āsurāṇi bhāvamāśādyā*) he harassed all. At last he was killed by Viṣṇu in the person of Kṛṣṇa and his son Bhagadatta was placed on the throne of Prāgjyotiṣa.<sup>2</sup>

In the epics and the Purāṇas, Dr. Kakati distinguishes two distinct persons having the name of Naraka. Many isolated events in the life of Naraka lie scattered in the epics and the Purāṇas. These were gathered up in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and a full-length portrait of the Naraka of our history with additions of new biographical materials not found anywhere else, was built up. Dr. Kakati even determines the age of Naraka and says that Naraka of Mithilā was a political adventurer who established himself in power in Prāgjyotiṣa somewhere between 200 A.D. and 500 A.D.

Copper-plate land grants as well as the *Kālikā Purāṇa* mention Bhagadatta as the son of Naraka. The *Harṣacarita* on the other hand describes Bhagadatta as being in the *anvaya* (line of succession) of Naraka. Bhagadatta is frequently mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as a powerful warrior. He is celebrated as a "warrior king" and "the mighty king of the *mlecchas*",<sup>3</sup> and is described as "the best wielder of the elephant-goad", among the kings assembled on the Kaurava side in the Great War, and as "skilful with the chariot".<sup>4</sup> Bhagadatta alone of the northern kings is famed for his long and equal contest with Arjuna.<sup>5</sup> He is dignified with the title "Śiva's friend" and esteemed as being not inferior to Śakra in battle.<sup>6</sup> He is also specially named "the friend of Pāṇḍu",<sup>7</sup> and is referred to in terms of respect and kindness by Kṛṣṇa when addressing Yudhiṣṭhira: "Bhagadatta is thy father's aged friend; he was noted for his deference to thy father in word and deed, and he is mentally bound by affection and devoted to thee like a father."<sup>8</sup> Bhagadatta was killed in the Mahābhārata war and was succeeded by his son Vajradatta (according to some inscriptions, Vajradatta is called his brother).<sup>9</sup>

2. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, ch. 37 ff. For an examination of Naraka's episode see Mankad: Narakāsura episode in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *J.A.R.S.*, X, pp. 14-22; Mishra: Historical notes on Narakāsura and Bhagadatta, *Ibid.*, XI, pp. 3-11.

3. *Sabha P.*, I, 1834.

4. *Udyoga P.*, CLXVI, 5804.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Sabha P.*, XXV, 1005; *Karna P.*, 104.

7. *Ibid.* 1008.

8. *Ibid.* XIII, 579-80.

9. *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali*, pp. 10-11.

The legendary account of the early kings of Assam is narrated in another Tāntric-Sanskrit text known as *Haragaurīśaṃvāda*.<sup>10</sup> The work contains an account of kings and ruling dynasties of India in general and particularly of Kāmarūpa. The names of the kings are generally indicated by the initial letters and the whole narration is in the form of a prediction in conformity with the method normally followed in the Purāṇas. The account of the early kings of Kāmarūpa in *Haragaurīśaṃvāda* begins with Bhagadatta, who it is said, will reign righteously over all the four divisions (*pīṭhas*) of Kāmarūpa at the beginning of the Kali age. After his death in the battle of the Kauravas, his son Dharmapāla will become king. He with his minister Sukṛti will rule the country for 125 years. After him there will be a number of rulers belonging to the dynasty of Naraka.

The rulers of Naraka's dynasty are given cryptically, evidently corresponding to the initial letters of their names. These are: Ja, Sa, Na, Ga, Bha, Ta, Ma, Ra, Ha, Da, Pa, Ca, La, A, Ma, Sa, Sya, Ma, Bhu, Go, Dha, etc. The number is about 24 or 25. It is further stated that the descendants of Naraka ruled for nineteen generations and that the last kings of the dynasty were Subāhu and Suparṇa. Subāhu became an ascetic, abdicating in favour of his son Suparṇa, the last of the line. Though *Haragaurīśaṃvāda* furnishes us with the names of a host of rulers, most of them are, in fact, fictitious. It is not possible to build up a genealogy of the early kings of Kāmarūpa upon such uncertain material. The Nidhanpur Grant of Bhāskaravarman (7th century A.D.) records that a period of three thousand years elapsed between the death of Vajradatta and the accession of Puṣyavarman (4th century A.D.), the founder of the new line.<sup>11</sup> Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Kāmarūpa in the seventh century,

10. The manuscript is not dated. But the last king of Kāmarūpa mentioned in the text is Kamala who died in Śaka year 1731 (1800 A.D.). Kamala is no doubt the Ahom king Kamaleśvara, who reigned from 1790 to 1810 A.D. (Vide Gait: *A History of Assam*, Second Edition, pp. 218-222). Dr. P. C. Bagchi edited the manuscript in *I.H.Q.*, XVIII, pp. 231-260 under the title "A New Source of the Political History of Assam."

11. The Nidhanpur Grant is the most important record of the contemporary history of India. It originally consisted of seven copper-plates, but one is missing up till now. They were found in a village named Nidhanpur in Sylhet at different times. The object of the Grant is the gift of land to Brāhmaṇas. Noticed by Padmanath Bhattacharyya in *I.A.*, XLIII, pp. 95 ff.; *I.H.Q.*, 1927, p. 839; by K. N. Dikshit, *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1921-22, p. 115. Edited by the former in *E.J.*, XII, pp. 73 ff.; *XIX*, pp. 118 ff. pp. 246 ff. and finally in the *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, pp. 1-43.

also records that there were a thousand generations between Viṣṇu, the progenitor of Naraka, and the birth of Bhāskaravarman, the pilgrim's patron king.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Kings of the Puṣyavarmā Family

A few centuries after the Christian era more acceptable historical material became available. Besides the contemporary epigraphical documents of the period, we have an invaluable account of the country from Hiuen Tsiang, who visited Kāmarūpa in 643 A.D. Further, the romantic but semi-historical *Harṣacarita* composed by Bāṇa, furnishes considerable material relating to our period. Among the earliest documents, the Nidhanpur Copper-Plate Grant and the recently discovered Doobi Plates<sup>13</sup> are epigraphs of unique importance. The original grant was made by Bhūtivarman, known also as Mahābhūtivarman (c. 554 A.D.), the great-great-grandfather of Bhāskaravarman (c. 600 A.D.—650 A.D.), but was renewed by the latter owing to the destruction by fire of the original record). The Nidhanpur Grant was issued from the *jaya-skandhārāra* (victorious camp) at Karnasuvarna. It contains the names of thirteen kings (and of most of their queens also), all of them of the family of Puṣyavarmā. The Naraka-Viṣṇu myth as recorded above was already current; that is to say, Puṣyavarmā's family traced their origin to Naraka, son of Viṣṇu. The inscription says that "when the kings of the Naraka family, having enjoyed the position of rulers for three thousand years, had all attained the condition of gods, Puṣyavarmā became the lord of the world."<sup>14</sup> The genealogy of the kings as described in the grant is given below:—

Name	Date
Puṣyavarmā	4th Century A.D.
Sainudravarman	
Balavarman	

12. Beal: *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, II, p. 196.

13. This set of copper-plate inscriptions has been discovered near the Pariharesvara Devālāya (a Śiva temple) at Doobi, a village about three miles away from the Pāthāśāla Railway Station, Kamrup. Originally it consisted of six copper-plates but the last plate was broken and lost. This is the second set of copper-plate grants of Bhāskaravarman. In point of time Doobi plates are earlier than the Nidhanpur Grant. Noticed by P. D. Choudhury in *J.A.R.S.*, Vol. XI, No. 3-4, pp. 33-38; also edited by him in *J.A.R.S.*, Vol. XII, No. 1-2, pp. 16-33.

14. *Vāṇīyeṣu tasya nṛpatiṣu varṣa-saḥaśratruyam padamavāpya  
Yāteṣu devabhūyam kṣitiśvarāḥ puṣyavarmābhūt* || — V. 7.

Name	Date
Kalyāṇavarman	5th Century A.D.
Ganapativarman <sup>15</sup>	
Mahendravarman	
Nārāyaṇavarman	
Mahābhūtivarman <sup>16</sup>	6th Century A.D. (234 G.E.)
Candramukhavarman	
Sthitavarman	
Suṣhitavarman <sup>17</sup>	
alias	
Mrgāñka	
Supratīṣhitavarman	7th Century A.D.
Bhāskaravarman. <sup>18</sup>	

Fortunately for us, three clay seals relating to Bhāskaravarman have been discovered at Nālandā.<sup>19</sup> The second seal gives a complete genealogy of the line of Puṣyavarmān. The Harṣacarita also mentions the names of the last five kings of the above list.<sup>20</sup> Although small discrepancies appear in the names, the three lists in general corroborate one another. Of these kings, the date of Bhāskaravarman is firmly established from the Harsacarita and the Si-yu-ki of Hiuen Tsiang. Calculating four generations to a century in the usual way, P. N. Bhattacharya places Puṣyavarmān, the first king of the line, in the middle of the fourth century A.D.<sup>21</sup> The naming of Sainudravarman, son of Puṣyavarmān, after the famous emperor of the Gupta dynasty, and of Dattavati (Dattadevī in the Nidhanpur Grant) after Dattadevī, queen of Samudragupta, led Bhattacharya to conclude that Puṣyavarmān was a contemporary of Samudragupta, probably a vassal of that great emperor, who took pleasure in making known his attachment to his liege-lord by naming his son and daughter-in-law after him and his queen.<sup>22</sup> But in Bhatasali's opinion the naming of a son after one's liege-lord would hardly be considered as a compliment. Bhatasali, therefore, considers that Puṣyavarmān was a contem-

15. Ganendravarman in the Doobi epigraph.

16. Bhūtivarman in the Harṣacarita.

17. Sthitavarman in the Harṣacarita.

18. Bhāskaradyuti in the Harsacarita. Also known as Kumāra.

19. Noticed by Diksit in A.R.A.S.I., E.C., 1917-18, p. 45; Correctly identified by Banerji, J.B.O.R.S., V, pp. 302-3; revised by Diksit, Ibid., VI, pp. 151-152; noticed by Barua, J.A.R.S., IV, pp. 89-93. All published by Hirananda Sastri in the M.A.S.I., No. 66. "Nālandā and its Epigraphic Material."

20. Ucchvāsa VII, pp. 246 ff.

21. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, Introd. p. 13.

22. Ibid., Introd., p. 14; I.H.Q., III, pp. 837 ff.

porary, not of Samudragupta but of his father Candragupta I, and named his son and daughter-in-law after the son and daughter-in-law of his friend, namely, Candragupta I. Bhattacharya accordingly places Puṣyavarman in the early part of the 4th century A.D.<sup>23</sup> K. L. Barua on the other hand, supports Bhattacharya's view and considers Puṣyavarman to be the frontier king (*pratyanta nṛpati*) of Kāmarūpa referred to in the Allahabad inscription, who was compelled by Samudragupta to enter into subordinate alliance with him by paying all kinds of tribute (*surva-karu-dāna*), obedience to his commands (*ājñākaraṇa*), and attendance at his court (*pratiāmāgamaṇa*).<sup>24</sup>

Puṣyavarman was succeeded by his son Samudravarman, who is said to have been swift in single combat.<sup>25</sup> He is said to be a fifth *samudra* (ocean) as it were, but only with this difference, that unlike the ocean which is always disturbed by larger fish swallowing the smaller one, Samudravarman was free from *matsyanyāya* troubles.<sup>26</sup> The occurrence of the expression *matsyanyāya* suggests that while during the reigns of Samudravarman's ancestors, the country witnessed disorder and anarchy, his own reign was peaceful.

Samudravarman was followed by Balavarman, who was a great warrior and "whose irresistible troops consisted his armour."<sup>27</sup> Next came his son Kalyānavarman and then Gaṇapati (-varman), who was endowed with innumerable qualities and according to the epigraph was born "to remove war and dissension from the country."<sup>28</sup> After him ruled his son, Mahendravarman, who was the repository of all sacrifices (*yajñavidhīnām-āśpadam*).<sup>29</sup> The second seal of Nālandā refers to him as the performer of two horse-sacrifices (*dviḥ-turaga-medhāharto*).<sup>30</sup> He appears to be the first among this line of kings to celebrate horse sacrifices, which is, no doubt, a fact of much political importance.<sup>31</sup> It would seem

23. New Lights on the History of Assam, I. H. Q., XXI, p. 22.

24. Early History of Kāmarūpa, p. 42

25. Nidhanpur Grant, v. 8.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, v. 9.

28. *Ibid.*, v. 11.

29. *Ibid.*, v. 12.

30. M. A. S. I., Op. Cit.

31. Dr. D. C. Sircar contends that the epithet *dviḥ-turaga-medhāharto* in line 5 of the Nālandā seal should refer, not to the preceding name Mahendravarman, but to the following name of Nārāyanavarman. "Āśvamedha celebrated by the kings of Kāmarūpa," I. H. Q., XXI, pp. 143-145.

that, as Bhattachari suggests, as the Gupta empire declined, the Kāmarūpa kingdom began to flourish, and Mahendravarman became a paramount sovereign in Eastern India by performing two horse sacrifices.<sup>32</sup>

Mahendravarman was succeeded by his son Nārāyaṇavarman, who was reputed to have possessed high knowledge in military and political affairs (*abhigata samṛchyārtha*).<sup>33</sup> Nārāyaṇavarman was followed by his son Mahabhūtavarman who is referred to also as Bhūtivarman or Bhūtavarman. The Baḍgaṅgā Rock Inscription<sup>34</sup> refers to Śri Bhūtivarman, who performed an *usvamedha* sacrifice, and it also gives the Gupta era date 234,<sup>35</sup> corresponding to 554 A.D. The value of the Baḍgaṅgā inscription, "which is the only dated one of the kings of the line Pusyavarman hitherto discovered" remarks Bhattachari, "can hardly be exaggerated".<sup>36</sup> The date of this inscription, according to him, must be of the last part of Bhūtivarman's reign, as by that date, the king had already performed a horse sacrifice, and his Minister of State had founded a religious convent Bhattachari, therefore, places Bhūtivarman's reign approximately between 520 and 560 A.D.<sup>37</sup> It appears from the Nidhanpur Grant that Bhūtivarman had a circle of feudatory rulers and that he was able to capture the whole of Kāmarūpa by his benign glance (*ikṣaṇa-jita-kāmarūpam*).<sup>38</sup> Bhūtivarman, as noticed above, made gifts of land to a large number of Brāhmaṇas in the Mayūra-śālimalāgrahāra in the Candra-puri-viṣaya, near the river Kausiki.

After Bhūtivarman, his son Candramukhavarman reigned in Kāmarūpa, and he was followed by his son, Sthitavarman, who according to the Nālandā seal, is described as the performer of two horse sacrifices (*dviraśvamedhayājī*).<sup>39</sup> He was followed by his son Suṣṭhitavarman, renowned as Śri Mrgāṅka. The *Harṣacarita* asserts that Suṣṭhitavarman was a powerful monarch "who took away the conch-shells of the lords of the armies, not their

32. Op. Cit. I. H. Q., XXI, p. 25.

33. Nidhanpur Grant, v. 13.

34. The inscription is incised in three lines and a quarter on a rock Dabakā in the Nowgong district. Edited by Bhattachari, J.A.R.S., VIII, pp. 138-139.

35. Dr. D. C. Sircar reads 244. "A Note on the Bargaṅgā Stone Inscription", J.A.R.S., X, pp. 64-67; I.H.Q., XX, pp. 143-145.

36. Op. Cit., I.H.Q., XXI, p. 21.

37. Ibid.

38. This the interpretation of the second verse as given by Bhattacharya, Kāmarūpa Śāsandevati, p. 27, Fn. 8.

39. Op. Cit.

jewels; grasped the stability of the earth, not its tribute; seized the majesty of monarchs, not their hardness." It even gives to him the sovereign title of *Mahārājādhīraju*.<sup>39a</sup> It appears from the Apshad inscription that the later Gupta monarch Mahāsenagupta led an expedition against Suṣhitavarman. It is recorded that Suṣhitavarman, was defeated by Mahāsenagupta, "whose mighty fame, marked in honour of victory over the illustrious Suṣhitavarman, white as a full-blown jasmine flower or water-lily, or as a pair of necklaces of pearls pounded into little bits, it is still constantly sung on the banks of the Lauhitya."<sup>40</sup> There is also a veiled reference in the Nidhanpur record itself to this defeat of Suṣhitavarman, wherein it is said that he (Suṣhitavarman) "gave away the goddess of royal fortune, like the earth, to suppliants."<sup>41</sup>

Suṣhitavarman had two sons, namely, Supratishitavarman and Bhāskaravarman. Strengthening the conjectures of Bhattacharya<sup>42</sup> and Basak<sup>43</sup> the newly discovered Doobi Copperplates<sup>44</sup> now conclusively prove that Supratishitavarman did reign for a few years. The said epigraph, further, records that the two princes, Supratishitavarman and Bhāskaravarman immediately after the death of their father had repulsed the attack of a mighty invading army of the Gauḍas. As observed by Choudhury,<sup>45</sup> this invading army probably belonged to Mahāsenagupta. As soon as Mahāsenagupta learnt that Suṣhitavarman died leaving behind his two minor sons (*prathamavayasyapi*) wherefore the tranquillity of the country was disturbed, he then lost no time to invade Kāmarūpa. The two brothers like Balarāma and Acyuta gave a heroic fight and brought bewilderment and consternation in the rank of the Gauḍas. But inspite of their brave resistance, the two brothers were completely covered with the shining arms of the enemies, and both of them fell into swoon in the midst of the battle field whereupon they were captured by the enemies. They, however,

39a. Cowell, p. 117.

40. C.I., III, pp. 206 ff; J.A.S.B., NS, XXII, pp. 321 ff. R. K. Mookerji holds that Suṣhitavarman belonged to the Maukhari dynasty (*Harsha*, p. 25, fn. 1). R. D. Banerji has, however, conclusively shown that he was a king of Kāmarūpa (J.B.O.R.S., XV, pp. 252 ff). Pires takes Mahāsenagupta to be a king of Malwa. Vide, Pires: *The Mankharis*, pp. 95-102.

41. v. 19.

42. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali, Introd. p. 16

43. History of North-Eastern India, p. 217.

44. J.A.R.S., XII, 1-2, p. 16-33.

45. J.A.R.S., XII, 1-2, p. 30 fn.

later on succeeded in getting themselves freed and returned to their kingdom causing great delight to the land of their father.<sup>45a</sup>

Supratiṣṭhitavarman died a premature death. He was succeeded by Bhāskaravarman. Bhāskaravarman was the greatest monarch of this family and one of the most remarkable rulers of mediæval India. He was a contemporary of Harṣavardhana, the limits of whose reign are known with more or less certainty as being 606 A.D. to 647 A.D. Bhāskaravarman, who outlived Harṣa by a few years, can therefore be placed with equal certainty between 600 A.D. and 650 A.D.

The most memorable event in the career of Bhāskaravarman was his alliance with Harṣa, made at the beginning of his reign. The *Harṣacarita* refers to his friendship as *ajaryyam saṅgatam*, that is to say, "undying association" and compares it with the traditionally famous alliance between Kuvera and Śiva, Daśaratha and Indra, Dhanañjaya and Kṛṣṇa, and between Karṇa and Duryodhana.<sup>46</sup> This alliance was made when Harṣa was marching (c. 606 A.D.) to take revenge against Śaśāṅka, the ruler of Gauḍa, who had treacherously murdered his brother. Bhāskaravarman's confidential messenger Hamsavega met Harṣa, when the latter had completed only one day's march from Kanauj, on the bank of the river Sarasvatī. He delivered the following message : "The sovereign of Prāgjyotiṣa desires with your majesty an imperishable alliance. .... Commission me to say that the sovereign of Prāgjyotiṣa may enjoy your majesty's hearty embrace as Mandara Viṣṇu's .... If your majesty does not accept his love, command me what answer to report to this proposal."<sup>47</sup> When he seized speaking the king, who from previous reports of the Prāgjyotiṣa king's great qualities had conceived a very high respect for him, gave immediate acquiescence to the proposal with the following words : "How could the mind of one like me possibly even in a dream show aversion. Hamsavega, when such a great and noble spirit, such a treasure of virtue and captain of the worthy, bestows his love as an absent friend upon me ? The Kumāra's design is excellent. Stout-armed himself, with me, a devotee of the bow, for his friend, to whom save Śiva need he pay homage ? This resolve of his

45a. This interpretation is from the reading of the Doobi Plates by Dr. Sircar, vide Gauda-Kāmarūpa struggle in the sixth and seventh centuries, I. H. Q. Vol. XXVI, No. 3, pp. 241-246.

46. Cowell, p. 218.

47. *Ibid.*

increases my affection.....Therefore use your endeavours that my yearning to see the prince may not torment me long."<sup>48</sup>

This new alliance, R. D. Banerji suggests, proved fatal to the Gaudas.<sup>49</sup> But unfortunately there is no record to show that either Bhāskaravarman or Harṣa succeeded in conquering the Gauḍa kingdom during the lifetime of Śaśāṅka. K. L. Barua, however, following Nagendranath Vasu, believes that after this alliance Śaśāṅka was overthrown and was obliged to retire to the hilly country in the south; and consequently Gauḍa with Karṇasuvārṇa came to the possession of Bhāskaravarman.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, relying upon Vincent Smith who held that the Gauḍa king Śaśāṅka "escaped with little loss"<sup>51</sup> in the first attack of Harṣa, and was actually in power even in 619-20 A.D., Basak maintains that "Harṣa might have marched a second time against Śaśāṅka's kingdom in the company of Bhāskara and wrested it either from his own hands or from those of his yet unknown successors some time after his death....and made it over to his ally Bhāskaravarman, who might have annexed it to his own kingdom."<sup>52</sup>

From the Nidhanpur Grant as well as from the account of the Chinese pilgrim, it is evident that Bhāskaravarman was in possession of Karṇasuvārṇa and Gauḍa. For the Nidhanpur Grant was issued by Bhāskaravarman from his victorious camp (*jayaskandhāvika*) as Karṇasuvārṇa, which comprised the modern districts of Burdwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad. P. N. Bhattacharya is, therefore, right in asserting that in commemoration of his triumphant entry into the capital of Karṇasuvārṇa, after having expelled the Gauḍa king, Bhāskaravarman made this grant of land to the Brāhmaṇas of the locality.<sup>53</sup> R. C. Majumdar, on the other hand, gives a later date for Bhāskaravarman's occupation of Karṇasuvārṇa. He considers that when Bhāskaravarman aided the Chinese expedition against the successor of Harṣavardhana and when the latter was defeated "he (Bhāskara) made himself master of Eastern India" and "pitched his victorious camp in the capital of his late rival, Śaśāṅka, and thus increased the power and prestige of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa to an extent never dreamt

48 Ibid., pp. 218-219.

49 *Bāṇgālār Itihāsa*, Second Ed., Vol. I, p. 108. *History of Orissa*, Vol. I, pp. 127 ff.

50. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, pp. 67-68.

51. *Early History of India*, Third Ed., p. 339

52. *Op. Cit.* pp. 226-227.

53. *Op. Cit.*, Introd., p. 16; also p. 5, 6 & 9.

of before."<sup>54</sup> Tripathi following Majumdar remarks that "in spite of the 'imperishable alliance' there seems little likelihood that Harṣa would allow him to appropriate these fertile provinces to himself, and thus gain an immense accession of strength."<sup>55</sup>

But that Gauḍa and with it Kārṇasuvardhana, came into the possession of Bhāskaravarman even during the life time of Harṣa, may incidentally be concluded from some incidents recorded in the life of Hiuen Tsiang. It is recorded that when Hiuen Tsiang was at the Nālandā monastery for the second time in 643 A.D., an invitation by letter through a messenger reached Śilabhadra, the teacher of the monastery, from Bhāskaravarman, requesting the teacher to send the Chinese pilgrim to his court. But Śilabhadra had to refuse the invitation because he had already arranged that the pilgrim should next visit the court of Harṣavardhana. A second invitation was sent, but that also being refused, Bhāskaravarman was greatly enraged and sent yet another messenger to Śilabhadra with the following message : "Your disciple like a common man has followed the way of wordly pleasure and has not yet learnt the converting power residing in the law of Buddha. And now when I heard the name of the priest belonging to the outside country my body and soul were overjoyed ; expecting the opening of the gem of religion (within me). But you, Sir, have again refused to let him come here, as if you desired to cause the world to be for ever plunged in the dark night (of ignorance). Is this the way in which Your Eminence hands down and transmits the bequeathed law for the deliverence and salvation of all the world ? Having an invincible longing to think kindly of and show respect to the Master I have again sent a messenger with a written request. If he does not come, your disciple will then let the evil portion of himself prevail. In recent times Śaśāṅka Rājā was equal still to the destruction of the law and uprooted the Bodhi tree. Do you, my Master, suppose that your disciple has no such power as this ? If necessary I will equip my army and elephants and, like the cloud sweep down and trample to the very dust that monastery of Nālandā. These words are true as the sun. Master, it is better for you to examine and see what you will do." The threat had the desired effect, and the pilgrim left for Kāmarūpa. When Hiuen Tsiang had been in Kāmarūpa for about a month, Harṣavardhana heard of it on his way back home after his attack on Koṇgoda. He sent a note to Bhāskaravarman request-

54. *Ancient Indian History and Civilisation*, p. 348.

55. *History of Kanauj*, p. 103.

ing him to send the pilgrim to his camp at once. Bhāskaravarman, however, replied that Harṣa "can take my head but he cannot take the Master of the law yet." Harṣa was annoyed, and he immediately sent the following message : "Send the head, that I may have it immediately by my messenger who is to bring it here." On receipt of this answer Bhāskaravarman got intimidated and personally proceeded with a large troop of elephants and ships up the Ganges, taking the pilgrim along with him, and arrived at the country of Kie-shu-ho-ki-lo (Kajāngala, near modern Rajmahal). Here on the north bank of the river he, together with his ministers proceeded to meet Harṣa, who received him courteously and then they were joyfully reconciled.<sup>56</sup>

It follows from the above account that Bhāskaravarman passed with a large army through the Gauḍa country without any opposition. Had Gauḍa been under the sway of any other king at this time, Bhāskaravarman would not have been allowed to proceed through the country with his army. D. C. Ganguli, therefore rightly believes that about this time, i.e., in A.D. 642, when Bhāskaravarman met Harṣa at Kajāngala, Gauḍa formed a part of Kāmarūpa.<sup>57</sup>

This episode and Bhāskara's previous solicitation for alliance with Harṣa of his own accord have led some scholars to believe that the king of Kāmarūpa had accepted Harṣa's suzerainty. But "by no stretch of imagination". Tripathi remarks, "this conclusion of a treaty can be interpreted as offering allegiance of his own accord."<sup>58</sup> Further, the circumstance of Bhāskaravarman's attending both the assemblies at Kanauj and Prayāga, also does not help us to determine the political relations of the two potentates. The Chinese pilgrim has left for us a detailed account of these religious assemblies. According to him the Kāmarūpa king was received with the highest honours by Harṣavardhana. In the procession of the golden Buddha image at Kanauj "Śilāditya-rājā, under the form of lord Śakra, with a white chowrie in his hand, went on the right, and Kumāra-rājā, under the form of Brahmī-rājā, with a precious parasol in his hand, went to the left. They both wore tiaras like the devas, with flower wreaths and jewelled ribbons."<sup>59</sup> After breaking up the assembly at Kanauj, Harṣa

56. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, pp. 169-174.

57. Political condition of Bengal during Hiuen Tsiang's visit, *I.H.Q.*, XV, pp. 122-124.

58. *History of Kanauj*, pp. 104-105.

59. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, p. 177.

arranged a religious convocation at Prayāga at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamunā. In this assembly Harṣa's tent was pitched on the north bank of the Ganges, and that Dhruvabhaṭa, Harṣa's son-in-law, the king from South India, was located to the west of the junction of the two rivers. The camp of the king of Kāmarūpa was on the south side of the river Yamunā, by the side of a flowering grove. The proceedings of this grand assembly lasted for seventy-five days, commencing with a military procession of the followers of Śilāditya-rājā and of Kumāra-rājā, (Bhāskaravarman) embarked in ships, and the attendants of Dhruvabhaṭa-rājā mounted on elephants, which proceeded in due state to the place of the appointed assembly. The kings of the eighteen countries joined the cortege according to arrangement.<sup>60</sup> These accounts, therefore, prove beyond doubt that Harṣa treated Bhāskaravarman in every way as a respected ally and esteemed friend and not as a vassal king.<sup>61</sup>

Bhāskaravarman was well educated in the śāstras. The Doobi Copper-Plates record that Bhāskaravarman's intellect was matured by listening to the essence of the meaning of the various śāstras. Further they state that he acquired high eloquence and poetic genius of all styles possessing sweet wordings with clear and superb ornamentation (*lalita-padam sarvamārga kavitram*). The Chinese pilgrim's account also throws some light on the personal character of Bhāskaravarman. He states that "the king was fond of learning",<sup>62</sup> and "men of high talents from distant regions aspiring after office visit his dominions as strangers".<sup>63</sup> We learn from Chinese sources that Bhāskaravarman evinced an interest in the thought and letters of China and wanted to read some great Chinese classic in Sanskrit translation. Hiuen Tsiang thought that the most suitable book of his country would be the Tao-teh-king, in which the teachings of Lao-Tze are enshrined; and after his return to China he set about making a Sanskrit translation of the work. We have, however, no trace now of this translation. If it is recovered "it will be a document of inestimable value in the world of Chino-Indian contacts — a permanent

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

61. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, pp. 78-79.

62. Watters, Vol. II, p. 186.

63. *Ibid.*

momento of India's genuine desire to know China, however limited that desire might have been."<sup>64</sup>

The very fact of Bhāskaravarman's inviting the Chinese pilgrim to his court is, in itself, a testimony to his love of learning. Though personally devoted to Śaivism, he was tolerant of other faiths, in which it is evident he was deeply interested. The pilgrim himself says that though the "king had no faith in Buddha, yet he much respected Śramaṇas of learning."<sup>65</sup>

The eulogy of the Nidhanpur Grant describes him as being created by the Creator for the purpose of re-establishing the institutions of society which had for a long time past become confused. It is said that he propagated the light of the āryyadharma by dispelling the darkness of the Kali Age, by means of a proper expenditure of his revenue. He caused the deep loyalty of his subjects to be heightened, on account of his power of keeping order, his display of modesty, and cultivation of close acquaintance with them. His gifts were bounteous and he could be compared with king Śivi for offering succour to the needy by self-sacrifice, and in the matter of timely application of the six political expedients he was as skilful as Brhaspati himself. Free from the usual vices of kings, he was always given to performing virtuous deeds. He was as it were, "the very life of Dharma, the abode of justice, the home of virtues, the treasury of supplicants, the shelter of the fearful, and the temple of plenty of Śrī."<sup>66</sup>

Bhāskaravarman outlived Harṣa, and, according to the Chinese annals, after the latter's death, he became the supreme master of Eastern India. Immediately after the death of Harṣa (c. 647 or 648 A.D.), his minister Arjuna or Arunāśva usurped the deceased monarch's throne. At the same time, the Emperor of China sent a mission to India under Wang-heuen-tse "in order that the principles of humanity and justice which had been diffused in that country should have a protector and representative there."<sup>67</sup> But Arjuna ill-treated the members of the mission and even massacred some of them. Those of them who survived, led by Wang-heuen-tse, escaped to Nepal and sought the aid of the kings of Nepal and Tibet. With the help of their forces, Wang-heuen-tse succeeded in destroying the city of Tīrhut and, defeat-

64. S. K. Chatterjee, *The National Flag and Other Essays*, p. 19.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Nidhanpur Grant*.

67. *J.A.S.B.*, VI, I, 69.

ing Arjuna, took him as prisoner to China. It also appears that this campaign against Arjuna was assisted by Bhāskaravarman, who sent abundant supplies, including "thirty thousand oxen and horses, and provisions for all the army, to whieh he added bows, scimitars, and collars of great value."<sup>68</sup>

Neither Bāṇabhaṭṭa nor Hiuen Tsiang nor any of the contemporary records refers to any wife of Bhāskaravarman or to the fact of his marriage. It is therefore certain that he died childless. When it is remembered that he is often mentioned as Kumārārājā, one is inclined to believe that Bhāskaravarman was a celibate all through his life. It also appears that shortly after Bhāskaravarman's death, whieh must have occurred after the Chinese mission, that is to say, after 648 A.D. there appeared an anarchy whieh brought to an end the line of kings which owed its origin to Naraka. In its place, as will be seen, a new line of kings headed by Śālastambha was ushered in. Bhandarkar<sup>69</sup> and Dasgupta<sup>70</sup> however, refer to one king, namely Devavarman, who according to them succeeded Bhāskaravarman. Their source of information is the record of a Korean priest. I-tsing in his *Kau-fa-kao-sang-chuen*, written sometime between 700 and 712 A.D., gives brief memoirs of fifty-six Buddhist monks who visited India and the neighbourhood from China after Hiuen Tsiang and before him. One of them, Hwui Lin, a native of Korea, in his memoir refers to a "king of Eastern India, whose name is Devavarman."<sup>71</sup> Both Ghosh<sup>72</sup> and Barua<sup>73</sup> on the other hand attempt to identify Avantivarman mentioned in some of the manuscripts of the *Mudrārākṣasa* with the successor of Bhāskaravarman on the ground that the said king Avantivarman like the Varman kings claimed his descent from the Boar incarnation of the God Viṣṇu.

68. J.A.S.B., VI, pp. 69-70; *Early History of India*, pp. 366-367; J.R.A.S., N.S., IV, pp. 85-86; I.A., IX, p. 20. *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia*, 1836, pp. 220-221.

69. I.C., Vol. II, p. 401.

70. The Occupation of Bengal by the Kings of Kāmarūpa, I.C. II, pp. 37-45.

71. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, Introd. p. xxvi ff; J.R.A.S., 1881, pp. 558-72; I.A., 1881, pp. 100-111, and 192-93.

72. J.P.A.S.B., Vol. XXVI, No. 1, p. 244.

73. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 109.

### 3. Kings of the Śālastambha Family<sup>74</sup>

The Bargāon Copper-plate Grant of Ratnapāla<sup>75</sup> records that after the descendants of Naraka had ruled Kāmarūpa for several generations, a great chief of the mlechhas, owing to a turn of adverse fortune, took possession of the kingdom (*mlecchādhinātho vidhicalanaraśādeva jagrāha rājyam*).<sup>76</sup> He was Śālastambha. According to the above epigraph, followed kings altogether twice ten in number." Further it informs us that as the last king, the twenty-first of the dynasty, the illustrious Tyāgasimha, went to heaven without leaving any of his race to succeed him, his subjects selected Brahmapāla, the father of Ratnapāla, to be their king on account of his relation to the Bhauma race, i.e., Naraka's family. The Śālastambha dynasty also assumed a common ancestry with the Bhauma kings which they supplemented.

The Bargāon grant is not dated, it only gives the regnal era. On paleographic grounds, Hoernle was disposed to place the grant in the earlier half of the eleventh century A.D. (c. 1010—1050 A.D.) As another grant of Ratnapāla, namely the Suālkuchi grant,<sup>77</sup> was made in the 26th year of his reign, one can reasonably refer Brahmapāla's reign to about 1000 A.D. Now calculating back from this date and assigning a minimum of sixteen years for the reign of each king, it is possible to place Śālastambha in the latter part of the 7th century A.D., that is, just after Bhāskaravarman.

74. As the kings of this line traced their descent from Naraka who was a son of Viṣṇu and Bhūmi, Bhandarkar calls them Bhauma of Hāruppeśvara. A Bhauma family of kings ruled also over Orissa. It does not appear that the Bhaumas of Assam had any relation with the Bhauma family of Orissa. Misra: *Orissa under the Bhauma kings*, pp. 80-82.

75. The record consists of three plates, and was found in the possession of a cultivator of the Mauza Bargāon, in the Tezpur subdivision of Darrang district. The object of the grant is to record that king Ratnapāla gave the village Vāmadevapāṭaka, situated in the Trayodaśagrāma-viṣaya in the Uttarakūla to the Brāhmaṇa Viradatta in the 25th year of his reign. Edited by Hoernle in J.A.S.B., LXVII, pp. 99 ff; and by Bhattacharya in Kāmarūpa Śasāndvalī, pp. 89-109.

76. Although Śālastambha is referred to as mlechha in Ratnapāla's inscriptions, the kings of his line, however, claimed descent from Bhagadatta in their records. K. L. Barua, therefore, suggests that Śālastambha himself was not a mlechha but an Aryan king. He was only a governor of a Mec province (*Mlecchādhinātho*) before he usurped the throne. Mec being a tribe in Assam, still surviving: *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, pp. 106 ff; Origin of the Dynasty of Śālastambha, king of Kāmarūpa, J.A.R.S., XII, 1-2, pp. 41 ff.

77. Found in the village of Suālkuchi of Kamrup district. It originally consisted of three plates, but the first is missing. The object of the grant is to record the gift of land to the Brāhmaṇa Kāmadeva. Edited by Hoernle in J.A.S.B., LXVII, pp. 120-125; Kāmarūpa Śasāndvalī, pp. 110-115.

We have a few records of this family in which some other names appear. An odd plate of a grant of Harjjara mentions seven princes, namely, Vijaya, Pālaka, Kumāra, Vajradeva, Harṣavarmā, Balavarman and Harjjaradeva.<sup>78</sup> The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla, son of Harjjara, mentions, besides Harjjara and Śālastambha, the name of king Prālambha.<sup>79</sup> The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman, grandson of Vanamāla, refers to king Jayamāla. Thus from these references, we draw up the following list of kings of the Śālastambha family :

Name	Approximate Date
Śālastambha	Middle of the 7th century A.D.
Vijaya (or Vigrahastambha)	Later part of the 7th century A.D.
Pālaka	Later part of the 7th century A.D.
Kumāra	8th century A.D.
Vajradatta	8th century A.D.
Harṣa (Śrī Hariṣa)	8th century A.D.
Balavarman	8th century A.D.
Cakra and Arathi <sup>80</sup>	Did not reign
Prālambha <sup>81</sup>	9th century A.D.
Harjjara	9th century A.D. (G. E. 510)
Vanamāla	9th century A.D.
Jayamāla (Viravāhu)	9th century A.D.
Balavarman	10th century A.D.
Tyāgasimha <sup>82</sup>	

The dates of some of these kings are known either from their own records or from other sources. For Śrī Harṣa has been identified by Kielhorn with *Gaudodrādi-Kalinga-Kośalapati Śrī-Harṣadeva* of the Paśupati inscription of the Nepal Licchavi king Jayadeva (153 H.E.—759 A.D.). Harṣadeva gave his daughter Rājyamati in marriage to the Nepal king, and she is also referred

78. Found in the village Häyangthal in Nowgong district. Probably the middle plate, the other two being missing. The inscription was issued from Haruppeśvara by Yuvarāja Vanamāla. Noticed by P. N. Bhattacharya in the *I.H.Q.* 1927, pp. 838, 841 and 844. English translation by the same author, *J.A.R.S.*, I, pp. 109-115, vide The Middle Plate of Harjjaravarman's copper-plate inscription.

79. It consists of three plates found in Tezpur. Published in *J.A.S.B.*, IX (1840), pp. 766 ff. Revised by P. N. Bhattacharya in *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali*, pp. 54-70.

80. Bhandarkar gives the names of Cakra and Arathi. But according to the inscriptions they did not rule: *A list of inscriptions of Northern India in Brāhma and its derivative scripts*, p. 380.

81. Bhandarkar identifies him with Balavarman.

82. Only twelve kings after Śālastambha are so far traceable, but the Bargāon Grant speaks of twenty-one ending with Tyāgasimha.

to in the epigraph as *Bhagadattarāja-Kulaja*.<sup>83</sup> Krishnaswami Ayyengar<sup>84</sup> and following him K. L. Barua<sup>85</sup> surmise that the Harṣadeva of our inscription and the lord of Gauḍa, Odra, Kaliṅga, and Kośala was the same Gauḍa ruler who was overthrown by Yaśovarman and whose defeat was the occasion for the glorification in the *Gaudaraho*. N. N. Dasgupta considers that Śrī Harṣa referred to in the copper-plate inscription of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Dantidurga (753 A.D.) and who was defeated by the Karnāṭa king Kirtivarmā was none but Śrī Harṣa of Kāmarūpa.

Besides the incomplete grant mentioned above, the Tezpur Rock inscription also refers to Śrī Harjjaravarinadeva. The inscription is dated 510, corresponding rightly to A.D. 829.<sup>86</sup> From the occurrence of such imperial titles as *Muḥarrājādhirāja paramēśvara*, it may be conjectured that Harjjaravarman wielded great power. Harjjara was succeeded by Vanamāla, who granted land to a Brāhmaṇa near Candrapuri, on the west of Trisrotā river (Tistā). The Tezpur Grant refers to his territory as extending as far as the seashore.<sup>87</sup> Vanamāla abdicated his throne in favour of his son, Jayamāla. The Prāgjyotiṣa king referred to in the Bhagalpur inscription of Nārāyaṇa, and with whom Jayapāla, the brother and commander of Devapāla, the Pāla king of Bengal, had friendly relations, is generally identified with Jayamāla.<sup>88</sup>

The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman was issued from the "ancestral camp" (of Hāruppeśvara).<sup>89</sup> It appears that Śālastambha on his succession owing to infamy of descent transferred the capital from Prāgjyotiṣapura to Hāruppeśvara<sup>90</sup> on the bank of the Brah-

83. *I.A.*, IX, p. 179; *J.R.A.S.*, 1898, pp. 384-85; *Le Népal*, II, p. 171.

84. *J.I.J.I.*, III, pp. 313-330.

85. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, pp. 111-119.

86. A short inscription of nine lines incised on a big boulder of granite, lying on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra, near Tezpur. First noticed by Gait in the *Report on the Progress of Historical Progress in Assam*, 1897. Mentioned by Marshall in *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1902-03, p. 229. Kielhorn read the first three lines in *Nachrichten der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, 1905, pp. 465-71. Edited by H. P. Sastri, *J.B.O.R.S.*, III, pp. 185-192; also by N. Vasu in *Social History of Kāmarūpa*, I, pp. 159 ff.

87. v. 17.

88. *Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvali*, Introd., pp. 23-24.

89. It consists of three plates and was found in the village of Sūtārgāon in Nowgong district. First noticed in Acam by Pandit Dhiresvara Kaviratna. Edited by Hoernle in *J.A.S.B.*, LXVI, Pt. I, pp. 121, 285-97; and by Bhattacharya in *Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvali*, pp. 71-88.

90. The word seems to be of Austric origin and means "to cover as with a dish on a basket". *Assamese, Its Formation and Development*, p. 54.

maputra. No account is available of the successors of Balavarman. It must, however, be surmised that a long period intervened between Balavarman and Tyāgasimha, the last king of the family of Śālastambha, as given in the Bargāon Grant.

#### 4. Kings of the Family of Brahmapāla<sup>91</sup>

The family of Śālastambha being extinct, the kingdom passed into the hands of a new line. This is evident from the Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla, which says that when Tyāgasimha, the twenty-first king of Śālastambha family, departed from this world without leaving any of his race to succeed him, "the subjects thinking it well that a Bhatuma (i.e., Naraka's race) should be appointed as their lord, chose Brahmapāla, a kinsman of the deceased ruler, on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country."<sup>92</sup> Thus Brahmapāla was elected by his people, an incident which finds a parallel in the history of Bengal.<sup>93</sup> Brahmapāla, the founder of the family, apparently belonged to a collateral line of the same family as that of his predecessors, both tracing their descent from Naraka.

We have no epigraphs of Brahmapāla, but from the records of his son Ratnapāla, it appears that he reigned about 1000 A.D. It is to be noted that in the records of his son, Brahmapāla is only called *Mahārājādhirāja*, while Ratnapāla has the full imperial title *Parameśvara Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja*. It may therefore, be surmised that Ratnapāla was the first powerful monarch of the family who had imperial pretensions. That he had a long reign is evident from his Suālkuchi grant, which was made in his 26th year. He removed his capital to Durjayā, the impregnable one, which "baffled and struck terror" into the heart of many kings. Bargāon inscription, while emphasising the excellence of the fortification of the capital city of Durjayā, states that its fortifications "were fit to cause discomfiture to the master of the Deccan country." The reference seems to suggest that some Deccan prince had led an expedition against Kāmarūpa. Katare suggests that this Deccan king was no other than the Chalukya prince Vikramāditya Kalyāni.<sup>94</sup> Ratnapāla had a son named Purandarapāla.

91. Bhandarkar names them as Bhauma-Pālas of Durjayanagar. Op. Cit., p. 38.

92. v. 10.

93. The Khalimpur copper-plate, E.J., IV, p. 243.

94. The Calukyas of Kalyāni and their political relations with the contemporary northern states, I.C., IV, pp. 43-52.

who married Durlabhā, and through her had a son named Indrapāla. It appears from the plates of Dharmapāla, a king of the same line, that Purandarapāla did not rule and died as Yuvaraja. Ratnapāla was accordingly succeeded by his grandson Indrapāla.

Of Indrapāla, we have two charters, the Gauhati<sup>95</sup> and Guākuchi Grants<sup>96</sup> recorded respectively in the 8th and 21st year of his reign. Though not dated, Hoernle refers the Gauhati Grant "with some probability" to the middle of the 11th century A.D.<sup>97</sup>

There are also, three charters of Dharmapāla, great-grandson of Indrapāla. Of these, the Khonāmukhi<sup>98</sup> and Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka<sup>99</sup> Grants were issued respectively in the first and third years of his reign. The Puṣpabhadrā grant<sup>100</sup> bears no date. Padmanath Bhattacharya places it on paleographical grounds, as well as from consideration of its contents, towards the end of his reign.<sup>101</sup> Dharmapāla in his inscriptions refers to his great-grandfather Indrapāla, his grandfather Gopāla, and to his father Harṣapala. Gopāla and his son Harṣapāla probably ruled towards the second part of the 11th century A.D.

Another Kāmarūpa king apparently of the Brahmapāla family was Jayapāladeva, mentioned in the Silimpur stone inscription of the Brāhmaṇa Prahāsa.<sup>102</sup> He has been taken as the successor of

95. Discovered in a field in course of cultivation in the village of Barpanara in the Darrang district. It consists of three plates and records a grant to the Brāhmaṇa Devapāla. Edited by Hoernle, *J.A.S.B.*, LXVI, pp. 113-32. 1897; *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, pp. 116-129.

96. Discovered in 1925 in the village of Guākuchi in the Nalbari Police Station in the Kamrup district. It also consists of three plates and records the gift of land to Devadeva of Sāvathi. Referred to in *I.H.Q.* 1927, p. 839. Edited by Bhattacharya in *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, pp. 130-45.

97. *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

98. A set of three copper-plates found at Khonāmukh, Nowgong district. The object of the grant is to record a gift of land to the Brāhmaṇa Mahēbhāhu. Edited by P. D. Choudhury, *J.A.R.S.*, VIII, pp. 113-126; corrected by N. K. Bhattachari, *J.A.R.S.*, IX, pp. 1-3.

99. The places where these three plates were found are not known. The land donated by the charter was Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka. Edited by Bhattacharya in the *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, pp. 146-167.

100. Found on the dry bed of the Puṣpabhadrā river on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. By this charter Dharmapāla granted land to the Brāhmaṇa Madhusūdana. Edited by Bhattacharya in the *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, pp. 168-184.

101. *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, p. 170.

102. The inscription is incised on a slab of blackstone and was found in the Mauza Silimpur of the Bogra district in Bengal. The object is to record the erection of a temple by Prahāsa, wherein it is incidentally men-

Dharmapāla.<sup>103</sup> The Rāmacarita of Sandhyākara Nandi refers to the fact that Rāmapāla, king of Gauḍa, conquered Kāmarūpa. It is believed that the Kāmarūpa king conquered by Rāmapāla was Jayapāla.<sup>104</sup> If this is correct, the dynasty of Brahmapāla came to an end towards the early part of the 12th century A.D. The names and approximate periods of reign of these kings are given below :

Name	Date
Brahmapāla	Later part of the 10th century A.D.
Ratnapāla	Early part of the 11th century A.D.
Purandarapāla (died as Yuvarāja)	
Indrapāla	do.
Gopāla	Later part of the 11th century A.D.
Harṣapāla	do.
Dharmapāla	12th century A.D.
Jayapāla	do.

Rāmapāla seems to have set up on the throne of Kāmarūpa a vassal named Tingyadeva. This is known from the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva, which on paleographic evidences has been placed by Venis about 1142 A.D.<sup>105</sup> In the inscription itself Tingyadeva is not mentioned as the ruler of Kāmarūpa; he is only referred to as a prince who ruled to the east of the Pāla dominion. It states that Gauḍeśvara Kumārapāla (1120 A.D.) having heard of the disaffection (*vikṛitam*) of Tingyadeva, who had been formerly treated with high honour, appointed Vaidyadeva, his own minister, as a ruler in Tingyadeva's place. The latter thereupon marched with his younger brother Budhadeva against Tingyadeva, and after defeating and killing him occupied the throne. The

tioned that he (Prahāsa) "though excessively solicited, did not by any means accept 900 gold coins and grant of land" from Jayapāla, king of Kāmarūpa. Edited by Basak, E.J., XIII, pp. 283 ff.

103. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, Introd., pp. 36-37.

104. Early History of Kāmarūpa, p. 148. In the absence of a dated and accurate chronology of the kings of the family, it is impossible to say, with any degree of certainty, who was the king of Kāmarūpa at the time of Rāmapāla's invasion. Hoernle assigned Ratnapāla to the first half of the 11th century A.D. (J.A.S.B., LXVII, pp. 102 ff.), and if this view is accepted, Dharmapāla may then be regarded as the vanquished king of Assam. Vide Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, Introd., p. 41.

105. It consists of three copper-plates, and is supposed to have been dug out in the course of cultivation, in the village of Kamauli, near the confluence of the Barnā and the Ganges at Banaras in October 1892. Edited by Arthur Venis, E.J., II, pp. 347-58. Gaudalekhamālā, pp. 127-46.

Kamauli Grant was issued from Harṣākoṇī,<sup>106</sup> and it records the gift of two villages, namely, Śāntipāṭaka and Mandarā, situated in the *viśaya* of *Bādā* in the *māṇḍala* of Kāmarūpa included in the Prāgjyotiṣabhukti. Vaidyadeva did not remain long as a feudatory of the Pālas of Bengal; for within a short time, possibly after the death of Kuṇārapāla, he became independent and assumed the imperial title of *Mahārājādhīrāja Parameśvara Paramabhaṭṭāraka*, and thus, though only for a short time, established a Brāhmaṇa dynasty in Kāmarūpa.

Dr. H. C. Ray considers that Vaidyadeva was succeeded by his brother Budhadeva, who had ably assisted him in gaining the throne.<sup>107</sup> Another inscription of the period, namely, the Assam plates of Vallabhadeva, refers to a new line of kings.<sup>108</sup> The inscription consists of five copper-plates, and records the establishment of a *Bhaktasālā* (almshouse) in the Śaka year 1107 (1185 A.D.) by Vallabhadeva at the command of his father and for the spiritual welfare of his mother. Although the plates were discovered in Assam as early as 1898, Gait takes no notice of them in his *History of Assam*. Padmanath Bhattacharya dismissed them, considering that they have nothing to do with Assam.<sup>109</sup> According to K. L. Barua, the kings mentioned in the said epigraph could not have been rulers of Kāmarūpa for the simple reason that there is no room for them between Vaidyadeva and 1185 A.D., the date of Vallabhadeva's inscription.<sup>110</sup> Ray, Vasu and Bhattasali,<sup>111</sup> on the other hand, take them to be the immediate successor of Vaidyadeva's descendants. The Assam Plates trace the genealogy of Vallabhadeva from Bhāskara, whom Bhattasali wants to identify with Bhāskaravarman.<sup>112</sup> The genealogy is given as follows:

106. According to K. L. Barua, this place was within the modern district Kamrup. *Op. Cit.*, p. 194.

107. *Dynastic History of Northern India*, I. p. 258.

108. The inscription consists of five copper-plates, and was presented to the Asiatic Society of Bengal by W. Wincher, Assistant Executive Engineer of Tezpur, Assam. First edited by Hultzsch in the *Zeitschrift D. Morg. Ges.*, XL, p. 42; re-edited by Kielhorn *E.J.*, V. (1898-99), pp. 181-88.

109. In his review of Sir Edward Gait's *History of Assam* (*I.H.Q.*, III, 1927, pp. 837 ff) Bhattacharya holds that the donor belonged to Eastern Bengal. Also Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali, Introd., p. 43, fn. 5.

110. *Op. Cit.*, *I.H.Q.*, pp. 197-98.

111. Ray, *Op. Cit.*, p. 58. *Social History of Kāmarūpa*, I, pp. 229 ff; Bhattasali, *New Lights on the History of Assam*, *I.H.Q.*, XXII, pp. 1-14.

112. *Ibid.*

Rāyārideva, known also as Trailokyasimha.

Udayakarṇa, known as Nihśaiikasimha.

Vallabhadeva.

Rayārideva, "the frontal ornament of the kings of Bhāskara's race" is said to have defeated the king of Vaṅga. Bhattasali finds here a reference to Rāyārideva's encounter with Vijayasena of Bengal.<sup>113</sup> Vallabhadeva was also a powerful king, being eulogised as a great hero "who sportively overcame hostile princes, as if they were courtesans."<sup>114</sup> Ray and Bhattasali hold that the campaign led by Muhammadbin Bakhtiyar in 1202 A.D. to Tibet<sup>115</sup> was annihilated in Assam either by Vallabhadeva or his successor.<sup>116</sup> This victorious incident was recorded on a stone boulder at Kānai-baḍaśi east of northern Gauhati, in the following words:

Śake turagayugmeṣe madhumāsatrayodaśe,  
Kāmarūpaṁ samāgatya turuskāḥ kṣayamāyayuh.

"On the thirteenth of Caitra, in the Śaka year 1127 (corresponding to the 7th March 1206 A.D.) the Turks coming into Kāmarūpa were destroyed."<sup>117</sup>

The name of another king of the period is preserved on a pillar inscription from Gachtal in the Nowgong district.<sup>118</sup> Though the inscription is in a very unsatisfactory condition Bhattasali has, however, been able to make out that the inscription was issued in the Śaka year 1149 (1227 A.D.) and that it refers to king Viśva-sundara-deva who ordered one Candrakānta to repair the damage

113. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

114. v. 10.

115. The *Tabaqat-i-Ndsiri*, the almost contemporary history of the time, gives an interesting account of the expedition. Raverty's translation, I. pp. 560 ff. Also *Riyaz-us-solétin*, translated by Abdus Salam, pp. 65-68. For a critical account see Bhattasali, Muhammad Bakhtiyar's Expedition to Tibet, *I.H.Q.*, IX, pp. 50-62.

116. K. L. Barua holds that the Kāmarūpa king who had defeated Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar was one Prithu: *Early History of Kāmarūpa*. Bhattasali has ably controverted the suggestion. *New Lights on the History of Assam*, *I.H.Q.*, XXII, pp. 4-6.

117. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, Introd., p. 44. Bhattasali: Muhammad Bakhtiyar's Expedition to Tibet, *I.H.Q.*, IX, pp. 49-50

118. The inscription was recovered by the author during his exploration work in the Kapili-Jamunā Valley in the Nowgong district in 1932. The inscription is incised in one of the sides of an octagonal pillar of stone, above 2'6" in height. There are altogether 24 lines of writing, each line containing on an average of about five letters, each letter being  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to  $\frac{3}{4}$ " long.

done by the *Mlecchas* to the temple of Siva.<sup>119</sup> Bhattachari further believes that the *Mlecchas* of the inscription were the Muhammadans who accompanied Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaj on his expedition into "Kāmrūd" and "Baṅg" in 6244 which began on December 22nd, 1226 A.D.<sup>120</sup> The next Muhammadan invasion was that of Ikhtiyar-uddin Yuzbak Tughril Khan, about 1257 A.D.<sup>121</sup> Soon after these invasions the old kingdom of Kāmarūpa seems to have split up into very many independent principalities. At the same time the Ahoms also penetrated into the Brahmaputra Valley, and ushered in a new era in Assam's history, with which we are not concerned here.

119. New Lights on the History of Assam, I.H.Q., XXII, pp. 12-14.
120. Raverty, I. p. 594.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

## CHAPTER III

### ADMINISTRATION

#### I. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

##### 1. *Preliminary remarks*

In this chapter an attempt will be made to describe the government and the administrative system that prevailed in the province from the accession of Puṣyavarman to the time of Dharmapāla, that is to say, from the fourth to the twelfth century A.D. It should, however, be noted at the very beginning that such a description must necessarily be very imperfect, as it is based upon scanty data scattered over the entire period. The available materials mainly consist of land grant copper-plates, which only incidentally provide information as to the system of government, and policy of the kings implicated, or as to innovations made by any one individual king. The impression which the records give is that government was traditional and that changes were few and of minor importance.<sup>1</sup> To a certain degree, however, they do supplement one another as regards the information they provide. At any rate, one must make the best use of these materials until more satisfactory sources of information are available. The section on *rāja-nīti* in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is also equally enlightening. It chiefly refers to the duties of king and ministers.

##### 2. *The King*

*Succession:* There was only one form of government, that is to say, monarchy. Kingship was hereditary, and generally the law of primogeniture prevailed. But Harjaravarman's Plate mentions that as King Balavarman's two sons Cakra and Arathi lacked in princely qualities, the crown was offered to Cakra's son, that is, to the late king's younger son's son: *Cakrāratho jagati hoddhata-rājaputrau rājyambabhāra tanayo hi kanṭyāsta.*<sup>2</sup>

The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla refers to a question of some considerable constitutional importance. The epigraph records the

1. B. K. Barua: The Administrative System of Kamarupa, J.A.R.S., III, pp. 23-32.

2. v. 8.

circumstances in which Brahmapāla, the founder of the dynasty, came to the throne. It says that as the last king of the Śilastambha dynasty died without issue the Prakṛti "thinking it well that a Bhauma (that is, one of Naraka's race) should be appointed as lord, chose Brahmapāla from among his kindred, to be king on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country (nirvamśaiḥ nṛpamekarinīśatitamam śri tyāgasimhābhīdhantesāmī vikṣya divāṅgatam punaraho bhaumo hi no yujyate | svāmīti pravicintya tat prakṛtayo bhūbhārarakṣākṣamāpi sāgandhyāt paricakrire narapatiṁ śrībrahmapālam hi yam'')<sup>3</sup>

The expression *prakṛti* is generally used in the sense of *prajā*, the people, and it may therefore be assumed that Brahmapāla was elected king by his subjects. The *Arthaśāstra* gives the name *prakṛti* to each of the elements of government, that is to say, the king, the ministers, the country, the fortress, the treasury, the army, and the ally, the aggregate of which constituted the monarchial state.<sup>4</sup> This theory of the constituent elements of the state is also known to the author of the Kamauli Grant, which refers to *saptāṅga-kṣitipādhihatvam*.<sup>5</sup> It may therefore be inferred that after the death of the last king of the Śilastambha dynasty, the ministers and the army with the consent of the people elected Brahmapāla to be their king. There were, however, other reasons for electing Brahmapāla as king, for it is said that he was a warrior who could single-handed overcome the enemy in battle : *eko'san jitarāṇi ripūn*.<sup>6</sup>

**Coronation :** From ancient times in India, the *abhiṣeka* (coronation) of the king was an important ceremony. Apart from its mystic value the rite of coronation conferred upon the king the legal title to his office. Though the records do not give a detailed account of the *abhiṣeka* ceremony of the Kāmarūpa kings we can, however, glean a little information about it from them. The Doobi Copper-Plate inscription refers to that king Sthitavarman who "enjoyed like Indra the performance of the coronation ceremony by the Bhāhmaṇas according to sāstras accompanied by the propitiatory sound of conch-shell and the drum."<sup>7</sup> The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman says that Virabāhu put his son on the throne in the prescribed form (*vidhirat*) on the aus-

3. v. 10.

4. See also the *Matsya Purāna*, Chap. 220, v. 29.

5. E.J., II, pp. 347 ff.

6. Bargāon Grant, v. 11.

7. J.A.P.S., XVII, 1-2, p. 23.

picious day (*puṇye'hani*).<sup>8</sup> The plate of Harjjavarman reveals the central rite of the *abhiṣeka*, which consisted of the pouring of sacred water on the king's head. This record states that Harjara was crowned king by sprinkling water on him drawn from all the sacred pilgrimage places, in auspicious silver vessels (*sarvva-tīrthāṁśāḥ sempurnanai rājataḥ kalaśeḥ śubheḥ simhāsano samāruḍo marudviriva vāsavah*).<sup>9</sup> Reference is again made in the same inscription to a special court which was held to celebrate the *rājyābhiṣeka* and which was attended by the subordinate rulers, merchants and feudatory princes (*śrīmān Harjjavararmāsau rājabhilī prajatairvṛtah abhiṣikto vāṇipūrvre rājaputreḥ kulodrateḥ*).<sup>10</sup> The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla says that when "Indrapāla sat on the throne, the gold-strewn floor of his audience-hall looked like a fruit-covered tree by reason of the jewels that fell from the crowns of the princes as they stood reverently bowing before him with joined hands."<sup>11</sup>

The symbol of royalty, according to the grant of Balavarman was "the royal umbrella of moon-like whiteness, together with the chowries" (*chattram śāśadhara-dharalām cūmara-yugala*).<sup>12</sup> The royal umbrella of the Kāmarūpa kings was known as *Vārunī-chakra*, which is said to have been first handed over to Bhagadatta by Kṛṣṇa.<sup>13</sup>

*Abhiṣeka-nāma*: The practice of conferring a new name on the king at the time of coronation, seems to have been prevalent. For instance, on his accession Suṣhitavarman took the name Mṛgāṅka (*Sus̄hitavarmā yaḥ khyātah śrī mṛgāṅka iti*)<sup>14</sup> Bhāskaravarman's earlier name, according to the *Harṣacarita*, was Bhāskaradyuti.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Vajradatta is said to have been given his name by the poets,<sup>16</sup> and Ratnapāla by his subjects, respectively.<sup>17</sup>

8. v. 23.

9. v. 13-14.

10. *Ibid.*

11. v. 5. The term used does not indicate that the floor was gilded, but strewn with gold, as drawn in the Ajantā painting.

12. *Ibid.* The five emblems of royalty are sword, umbrella, chowrie, crown and shoes. Tawney. Some Indian methods of electing kings, *Pro. A.S.B.* Nov. 1891, pp. 135-38

13. Kāmarūpa Śāsanavalī, Intro. p. 6, f.n. 1, p. 15.

14. Nidhanpur Grant, v. 18.

15. Cowell, p. 217

16. Grant of Balavarman, v. 8.

17. Bargāon Grant, v. 13.

**Abdication :** Instances of abdication are not rare, especially when a king abdicates in favour of a younger prince and retires to spend the rest of his life in pious meditation. This renunciation is not merely part of the Indian esoteric tradition, but was undoubtedly a common practice. The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman relates that Vanamāla abdicated in favour of his son Jayamāla "having observed that his son had finished his education and attained adolescence".<sup>18</sup> Jayamāla, likewise, in his old age handed on the crown to his son, Balavarman.<sup>19</sup> An even more interesting case of abdication is that of Brahmapāla, who is said to have abdicated in favour of his son Ratnapāla out of a sense of duty.<sup>20</sup>

**Imperial titles :** The working of a monarchical form of government depends largely on the personal qualities of the sovereign. Mighty empires in India have risen under strong kings only to fall under a weak ruler. The Kāmarūpa kingdom was no exception to this. It was founded and strengthened by the arms of Puṣyavarman and Mahendravarman, and its administration was stabilised by a long list of energetic and powerful monarchs. In Kāmarūpa, as in other Indian kingdoms, the king was the head of the administration, and occupied the commanding position in the state. His chief title was *Mahārājādhīrāja* (supreme king of kings). The Baḍagangā Rock inscription also mentions two religious titles : *Śrī paramadaivata* and *parama bhāgarata*.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent rulers in addition to these titles, like the Imperial Guptas, delighted in designating themselves by such high-sounding honifics as *parameśvara* (supreme lord), *paramabhaṭṭāraka* (one who is supremely entitled to reverence or homage) which are evidently more than mere symbols of earthly paramountcy. Apart from these imperial titles, the kings used special personal titles (*birudas*). Indrapāla, for instance, caused thirty-two *birudas* to be inscribed in his records.<sup>22</sup> From the use of such titles it may be concluded that the king, at least in theory, was regarded as being of divine origin. He was in fact, addressed as *deva* and his queen as *devī* or *mahādevī*.<sup>23</sup> In their *prāśastis*, the king was frequently compared with Hari, Hara, Viṣṇu, Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Bhāskara, Kuvera, Agni, etc. The Grant of Banamāla

18. v. 16.

19. Ibid, v. 22-23.

20. v. 15.

21. Op. cit.

22. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali, pp. 139-40.

23. For interpretation see Hocart: Kingship, p. 10.

relates that Lakṣmī forsaking Viṣṇu "came down to Harjjara with all the personal beauty of her sex" and determining in her mind that "because this conqueror (Harjjara) is possessed of all the personal beauty, as well as the noble qualities of my consort (Viṣṇu) who has matchless might and a chariot wheel on his hand, I shall surely become his chief queen. Thereby I shall not undergo any degradation."<sup>24</sup> Vaidyadeva is compared with Vṛhaspati as regards his knowledge, and the sun as regards his energy, and Viṣṇu as regards his good actions, and Varuṇa as regards his stability and Kuvera as regards his wealth, and the king of Champā (Karṇa) as regards his liberality.<sup>25</sup> These comparisons are derived from the traditional ideas of kingship mentioned in the earlier textbooks. The Śukranīti says that, like Indra, the god of gods, the king protects, like Vāyu, the spreader of scents, he generates kind and harsh actions; like the sun, the destroyer of darkness, he crushes unorthodoxy and establishes the true faith; like Yaina, the god of death, he punishes offences; like Agni or fire, he purifies and enjoys all gifts; like the delightful moon, he pleases everybody by his virtues and activities; like Kuvera, the god of wealth, he protects the treasure and possession of the state. It should, however, be borne in mind that in spite of these claims to divinity, the king was never an autocratic ruler. He was considered to be an incarnation of God on earth, functioning for the welfare of his subjects by ruling over them righteously and in accordance with the sacred laws laid down in the *Vedas*, *Smritis*, and *Dharmaśāstras*.

**Personal Qualities:** The epigraphs provide us with numerous references to the personal qualities necessary for kingship. It is said that in physical beauty the king even outdid Manimatha or Cupid (*manmathonmāthi rūpam*).<sup>26</sup> Vanamāla was described as being "broad in the chest, slender and round in the waist, with a thick-set neck and club-like arms".<sup>27</sup> The same record says that Balavarman was "endowed with eyes resembling the undulating flowers of the blue lotus, with a thick-set neck and well-formed arms, and with a figure like fresh lotus flower just opened under the touch of the rising sun".<sup>28</sup> The terms used are reminiscent of those used to describe the beneficent form of the gods in the *Śilpaśāstras*.

24. v. 13-14.

25. Kamauli Grant, v. 19.

26. Bargāon Grant, line 47.

27. Grant of Balavarman, v. 12.

28. v. 20.

Almost down to our own times war was the sport of kings, and success in war and valour in battle was the rulers' highest ambition. The strength and valour of the king were such as to surpass Skanda, god of war. He was an Arjuna in fame, Bhīma-sena in war, Kṛtānta (god of death) in wrath, a forest conflagration in destroying his adversaries (*dāvānalo vipakṣavirodhī*).<sup>29</sup> Single-handed he overcame his enemies in battles;<sup>30</sup> and gathered fame by raids on his enemies.<sup>31</sup> He gave extraordinary proofs of heroism by the way in which he captured hostile kings;<sup>32</sup> and equalled the prowess of the whole circle of his feudatories by the strength of his own arm.<sup>33</sup>

*Moral Qualities*: The king was endowed with innumerable good qualities emulating the renowned good deeds of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa.<sup>34</sup> His face was never disfigured by anger, nor was any low word ever heard from him; he never used improper words, and his disposition was always noble.<sup>35</sup> He was foremost amongst the just and the righteous<sup>36</sup> like the sweet breeze of the Malaya mountains.<sup>37</sup> He possessed a sense of duty, forbearance, gentleness towards religious preceptors, liberality like king Śivi, truthfulness like Yudhiṣṭhīra, modesty, affability and all-embracing compassion towards his subjects.<sup>38</sup>

*Learning and Culture*: He was the supporter of learning and of fine arts, and the patron of poets and learned men.<sup>39</sup> He is described as the moon in the sky of learning (*śāśadharo vidyā-nabhaḥ*),<sup>40</sup> and was accomplished in all the sixty-four arts.<sup>41</sup> His profundity was such as to put into shade the ocean, his intelligence such as to be a guarantee of the conquest of the world.<sup>42</sup> "He dived deep into, and passed across, the deep and broad streams of all sciences, the dashing waves of which are the *pada-vākyā*-

29. Bargāon Grant, line 49.

30. *Ibid.*, v. 11.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 21-22.

33. Nidhanpur Grant, lines 37-38.

34. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v. 9.

35. Grant of Balavarman, v. 13.

36. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v. 15.

37. Bargāon Grant, lines 49-50.

38. Nidhanpur Grant.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Bargāon Grant, line 49.

41. Nidhanpur Grant.

42. Bargāon Grant, lines 47-48.

*tarka-tantra*, i.e., rhetoric, philosophy, logic and religion.<sup>43</sup> These titles, no doubt, are conventional, but they embody a very real ideal. They are literary in origin and reflect the culture of the age. They, therefore, cannot be passed over as mere verbal adulmentation or servility.

**Administrative ability:** The inscriptions lay down certain ideal standards for royal administration, although it is difficult to state whether or not they were actually observed in practice. The grant of Vanamāla states that the first and foremost duty of the king was to afford protection to all his subjects and to look to their general wellbeing. The king was accustomed to gratify the desire of all the classes of his people. According to the Nidhanpur Grant, the king devised many ways of increasing the enjoyment of his hereditary subjects. He was the repository of principles of state-craft (*sāṅkhyaṛthābhijñā*)<sup>44</sup> and knew well the six-fold measures of royal policy.<sup>45</sup> The Kāmarūpa kings evidently realised that material wealth was indispensable for the wellbeing of the people. In the Subhaṇkarapāṭaka grant the king Dharmapāla though specified as "Defender of the Faith", nevertheless protected the wealth of his subjects (*Kāmamarthaśca pālayati*).<sup>46</sup> As the following passage shows the king judiciously applied the revenue for the welfare of the people—*yathāyathamucita karanikara vitaranya*.<sup>47</sup> It is thus clear that the general good was set before personal enrichments or enjoyment.

**Religious activities:** More important than these elementary duties of the ruler was the preservation of the social solidarity of the people by enforcing on them the observance of the āryya-dharma, based on immemorial custom and the authority of the sacred texts. India, during this period, saw the decline of Buddhism and the resuscitation of the Hindu way of life. In Kāmarūpa this was accomplished by a revival of the ancient āryya-dharma, modified to some extent by the history. In the Nidhanpur Grant, it is clearly stated that King Bhāskaravarman revealed the light of the āryya-dharma by dispelling the accumulated darkness of the Kali age (*ākulita-kali-timira-sañcayatayā-prakāśitāryya-dharmālokaḥ*).<sup>48</sup> The Hindu conception of dharma is derived from

43. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v. 16.

44. Nidhanpur Grant.

45. Kāmarūpa Śāsanavālī, p. 32, f.n. 2.

46. v. 12.

47. Nidhanpur Grant, line 36.

48. Lines 36-37.

the idea of established right. It works the whole field of human activities, as well as the established social order with its attributes of law, conduct and worship. Society, according to the Hindus, exists for the maintenance of *dharma*, that is, the doing of that which is good and conducive to the attainment of the ultimate object of existence. The State is embodied in society to enable those constituting society to pursue this *dharma* unhampered by those with whom their lot in life may be cast.<sup>49</sup> This idea of *dharma* provides the motive for all social life, and the duty of a government, as an organ of society, is to provide for the undisturbed maintenance of *dharma* on earth.<sup>50</sup> In order to do so, it must establish the social orders (*varṇa*) and the stations in life's progress which are known as *āśrama*. Manu, who is our main authority on the subject, says: "The king has been created (to be) the protector of the classes (*varṇa*) and orders, who, all according to their rank, discharge their social duties."<sup>51</sup> In obedience to this ancient tradition and its textual embodiments, Bhāskaravarman is said to have "properly organised the duties of the various classes and stages of life that had become confused."<sup>52</sup> The grant of *Agrahāras* to a large number of Brāhmaṇas, and the erection and maintenance of numerous temples, indicate fully the vigour with which the early kings of Kāmarūpa pursued religious activities.<sup>53</sup> That the Vedic religion was assiduously practised by the kings is proved by the reference to *āśramedha* sacrifices.<sup>54</sup> Numerous references are also available to kings, who studded the kingdom with "white-washed temples" and "sacrificial courtyards with immolating posts," as well as to "the skies being dark with the smoke of offerings."<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Central Administration

We have seen that from the time of Mahendravarman, who performed two horse sacrifices,<sup>56</sup> the Kāmarūpa kingdom ceased to be a small state and developed imperial dimensions. The empire

49. *Manu*, IV, p. 176.

50. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v. 18.

51. *Manu*, VII, p. 221.

52. Nidhanpur Grant, line 35.

53. See *infra*.

54. See *supra*, Chap. II.

55. Grant of Varamāla, v. 28-29; Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v. 10; Subhāskarapātaka Grant, v. 7.

56. See *Supra*, Chap. II.

was built up by defeating in battles the rulers and chieftains of the neighbouring territories. This is clearly indicated by the incomplete set of copper-plates of Harjjara, which states that the frontier kings, unable to fight, sued for peace with the king of Kāmarūpa (*rājyārthaṃ vijigīṣavō giridariprānteṣu yastāhsthitāḥ sandhyarthaṁ sāraṇēṅgatā nṛpasutāḥ sthāne yamadhyāsate ||*)<sup>57</sup> The problem of administration therefore, in this age of conquests and increasing empire, was not a simple matter. Throughout our period, as shown by the epigraphs, there was an elaborate system of government both central and local.

Among the officers of the central administration, the most important were the *Sāmantas*, *Yuvarāja*, *Mahāsenāpati* and the *Amātyas*. The *Sāmantas* or the feudatory chiefs, were the king's immediate subordinates. Writers like Manu have laid it down that even when an enemy king is conquered or killed in war, the conqueror should not annex his state, but should appoint a near relative of the former ruler as his own nominee to the vacant throne, imposing conditions of vassalship upon him.<sup>58</sup> The Kāmarūpa kings followed this principle, and, as a result, their territory included a large number of feudatory states. The rulers of these feudatory states enjoyed the title of *Sāmanta*, but they were also known as *Rājā*. These vassal chiefs, assisted the emperor in military undertakings and waited upon him whenever required. The inscriptions state that the *Sāmantas* constantly came to the capital, mounted on elephants and horses, or riding in litters, to pay due respect to the sovereign.<sup>59</sup> The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva shows that the sovereign sometimes displaced disloyal feudatory chiefs and established loyal ones in their place.<sup>60</sup> From these loyal feudatory chiefs were recruited the highest officers of the state. The chief of the *Sāmantas*, the *Mahāsāmanta*, was probably appointed to exercise some sort of control over them, or possibly as their chamberlain. The Nidhanpur Grant mentions that *Mahāsāmanta* Divākaraprabha was in charge of the *bhāṇḍāgāra*, royal storehouse. The royal storehouse is universally said to be the support of the king (*koṣamilo hi rājeti pravādāḥ sārvalaukikāḥ*), so it was natural to entrust the office to a high official. His business was to see that all necessary articles were kept in readiness or distributed in accordance with the king's orders. The *Kālikā*

57. v. 12.

58. VIII, p. 202.

59. Grant of Vanamāla.

60. Op. Cit.

*Purāṇa* recommends that for each of the established departments of the treasury, local administration, and the judiciary, a group of officers should be appointed.<sup>61</sup> Further, it enjoys that they should not be allowed to hold office permanently. The Tezpur Rock inscription speaks of a *Mahāsāmanī* who was a *Senādhīyakṣa*, a general.<sup>62</sup>

The king's eldest son was heir-apparent (*yuvrāja*),<sup>63</sup> but no detailed information is available as to his duties and functions. That his share in the public administration consisted in the promulgation of royal orders is known from the Grant of Hajjaravarman, for this epigraph was issued under the orders of the *Yuvrāja Vanamāla*.<sup>64</sup> The epithet *Kumāra* was applied to a son of the king and usually he was appointed to a high administrative office, such as a provincial governorship or viceroyalty. But strangely enough, the *Harṣacarita*<sup>65</sup> and the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang,<sup>66</sup> mention *Kumāra* as the title of the reigning king, namely Bhāskaravarman.

In the stereotyped lists of persons to whom commands were issued, appear the titles of *Rājā*, *Rājñī* or *Rājaputra*. *Rājā*, evidently does not refer to the sovereign who issued the grant. Both the expressions *Rājā* and *Rājñī*, must therefore refer to feudatory rulers and their queens. The term *Rājaputra* likewise may mean either a prince of the royal family, that is to say, a younger son or nephew, or it may possibly be used in a more general sense with the same meaning as the modern Rājput. The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman, also, mentions the office of *Rāṇaka*, and subsequent records refer to still another office, the *Rājanyaka*. In the lists, *Rāṇaka* precedes *Rājanyaka*, and both are preceded by *Rājñī*. This indicates an order of precedence and that the office of *Rājanyaka* was inferior to that of *Rāṇaka*. A similar term, namely, *Rājanaka*, which is probably only a corrupted form of *Rājanyaka*, occurs in the Chamba inscriptions.<sup>67</sup> This title, as Vogel suggests, corresponded to *Rājā* and was applied to the vassals of the local *Rājūs*. However, the *Rājataranginī*, as quoted by him, suggests

61. *Koṣe janapade dande caikaikarra trayam trayam  
prastāvadvinijumjita raksennailēśi-atastrimān'*  
Ch. 84, v. 54.

62. *Op. Cit.*

63. Harjjavarman's Plate; Śubhaṇkarapāṭaka Grant, v. 6.

64. *Ibid.*, line 25-26.

65. Cowell, pp. 211 ff.

66. Watters, II, p. 186.

67. *Antiquities of Chamba*, pp. 110; 121.

that the word *Rājanaka* used to be applied in Kashmir in the sense of minister. It is, therefore, probable that the title *Rājanaka* originated from *Rājanya*, signifying a minor officer.<sup>68</sup>

Certain inscriptions make it plain that in the general administration of the State, and especially in the initiation of State policy, the sovereign was assisted by a council of ministers (*saciva-samūja*)<sup>69</sup> In the life of Hiuen Tsiang, it is reported that when Bhiaskaravarman accompanied by his ministers went to meet Harṣa on the bank of the Ganges, the king, before usually meeting Harṣa, held a conference with his ministers.<sup>70</sup> The Harijara Plates refer to the *Mahāmatya* Govinda who probably was the Prime Minister of the Council.<sup>71</sup> Ministers are referred to as *mantrin*, *amātya* and *saciva*. In the *Arthasāstra*, *amātpa* is used in a general sense, including both *sacivas* and *mantrins*. The *Kāmandakīya Nīti*, however, makes distinctions between the three officers. According to it, a *mantrin* is one who should consider, make a decision, and report to the king about the use of the four means of government: peace, corruption, dissensions, and force, when, where and how to be brought about; also about their respective results, good, bad or middling. An *amātya*, on the other hand, is spoken of as being a councillor, who should report to the king about the cities, villages, hamlets, and forests in his dominion, the arable land, the cultivated land, the cultivator, the revenue due from them, the actual receipts and the balance due; the forest lands, the barren lands, the fertile ones not actually under cultivation; the receipts for the year from fines, taxes, mines and treasure troves, the ownerless, lost and stolen property. The *amātya* was, therefore, obviously concerned with revenue matters. The Baḍagangā Rock inscription refers to one Aryaguna who was a *Viṣayāmātya* during the reign of Bhūtivarman.<sup>72</sup> The *saciva* was a war minister: he had to examine carefully and report to the king the previous stock, the fresh supply, the balance due, the useful and the useless among elephants, horses, chariots, camels and infantry, in addition to many other duties connected with the king's militia. Vaidyadeva, who was subsequently appointed ruler of Kāmarūpa, is mentioned as

68. It should be noted here that the suffix *-ka* in Sanskrit is used to signify a diminutive form.

69. Karnauli Grant.

70. p. 172.

71. Kāmarūpa Śāsandvalī p. 51

72. Op. Cit.

having originally served as *saciva* under Gauḍeśvara Kumārapāla. He is described as a sharp-rayed sun in the midst of the lotus of the assembly of the *sacivas* (*saciva-samāja-saroja-sīgnabhānuḥ*).<sup>73</sup> Prior to his appointment as ruler of Kāmarūpa, he possibly won victory in a naval battle.<sup>74</sup> He had given further proof of his pre-eminence as an able general by defeating Tiṇgyadeva.<sup>75</sup>

The Kamauli Grant indicates that the offices of ministers were hereditary and were held by Brāhmaṇas. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* enjoins the appointment of wise and well-educated Brāhmaṇas as ministers.<sup>76</sup> In the case of Vaidyadeva, according to the Kamauli Grant, the office of the *mantrin* descended from father to son for no less than four generations.

The maintenance of foreign relations formed a very important department of the state. Kāmarūpa kings were able to establish diplomatic relations with the various ruling dynasties of India : doing so, in certain cases, by intermarriage.<sup>77</sup> The *Harsacarita* describes the eternal alliance between Bhāskaravarman and Harṣa.<sup>78</sup> The officer appointed to maintain proped relations with foreign powers was known as *Dūta*, ambassador or envoy. The office was obviously one of great trust and responsibility, and was accordingly given only to a man of noble descent. The *Harṣacarita*, referring to Hamsavega, the confidential *Dūta* of Bhāskaravarman, who was sent to wait upon Harṣa, says that Hamsavega's "very exterior, delighting the eye with graceful curves, belied the weight of his qualities."<sup>79</sup> The poet describes his reception at Harṣa's court. After the Chamberlain had announced the Kāmarūpa ambassador. King Harṣa commanded that he should be immediately admitted. While still at some distance from the throne Hamsavega who was escorted in person by the Chamberlain "embraced the courtyard with his five limbs in homage."<sup>80</sup> At the king's gracious summons to draw near, he approached him

73. v. 10.

74. *Ibid.* v. 11

75. *Ibid.* v. 14.

76. *mantrinastu nṛpah .curyadd riprān vidpātikāradān |*  
*vinayajñān kulināmīca dharmārtha kusalāngṛjūn ||*

Ch. 84 v. 105.

77. Harṣadeva gave his daughter Rājyamatī in marriage with the Nepal king Jayadeva. See *Supra*. It is mentioned in the *Rājataranginī* that Meghavāhana of Kashmir married a princess of Prāgjyotiṣa named Amṛatā-prabhā. Bk. II, pp. 148-59; Bk. III, p. 9.

78. Cowell, p. 218.

79. *Ibid.* p. 211.

80. *Ibid*

at a run and buried his forehead in the footstool ; and when the king laid a hand on his back, he once more bowed down. Finally, he assumed a position not far away, indicated by a kindly glance from the king. Turning his body a little to one side, he sent away his chowrie-bearer, who stood between him and the ambassador. He then inquired familiarly, " Hamsavega, is the noble prince well ? "<sup>81</sup> This introduction was followed by an exchange of gifts between the two courts. Hamsavega laid before Harṣa the presents he had brought from his master. These presents were accepted in a friendly manner and the ambassador was then sent to the Chamberlain's house. Again at the hour of dinner, King Harṣa dispatched to Hamsavega the remains of his toilet sandal enclosed in a polished cocoanut covered with a white cloth, a pair of robes, touched by his person, a waistband wrought of pearls, a ruby and a plentiful repast. Later, Harṣa heard the ambassador in private. Then, his mission fulfilled, he was permitted to return to Kāmarūpa with all honours due to an official of his rank. Hamsavega was sent away by Harṣa, " laden with answering gifts in charge of eminent envoys ".<sup>82</sup>

In this connection mention may be made of the household establishment of the king, which was a large one. It included the Rājavallabhas, Rājaguru, Bheṣaja, and the court poets. The character and functions of the Rājavallabha are not clearly stated in the epigraphs ; the word means " royal favourites " and may have corresponded to some kind of Privy Councillors. The Bheṣaja, more commonly known as Rāja-vaidya, was the royal physician, and looked after the health of the king, as well as being in charge of the public health department. Among the other officers of the palace were door-keepers, ushers, chowrie-bearers, body-guards, chamberlains and so forth. That the office of the chief door-keeper carried a certain dignity is apparent from the use of the epithet Mahādvārādhīpati. Persons seeking audience with the king or entrance into the palace had to obtain the approval of this officer, who appointed the dvārapatis who actually guarded the palace-gates. Along with these officers is mentioned another official called Mahāpratihāra, who was also connected with the routine of the court life. In our records the title is applied to both military and civil administrative officers, as well as feudatories.<sup>83</sup> It is therefore likely that the Mahāpratihāra was a high

34936

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., pp. 211-221

83. Harjaravarman's Plate.

official in the police and military departments. The apartments of the royal women were commonly styled *antahpura*. It appears that the keeper of the door of the seraglio was an old lady, for she is designated *Mahallakaprauḍhikā*.<sup>84</sup>

Here a reference must be made to a group of officers known as *Dūtaka*, *Lekhahāraka*, and *Dirgadvagāha*, who communicated the royal commands to officials, as well as to the people. They also performed the duties of couriers. As will be seen in chapter IV there appears to have been a system of communication by means of couriers (*Dirgadvagāha*). These couriers not only carried letters and messages but also served as guides or escorts. Hiuen Tsiang was granted such an escort at the special order of Bhāskaravarman.<sup>85</sup>

Before closing this list of officers, it is necessary to consider an expression in the Nidhanpur Grant. It relates to an officer issuing a hundred commands, who was qualified with five great sounds (*prāpta-pañca-mahā-sabda*). The term *prāpta-pañca-mahā-sabda* is somewhat obscure, but is often met with in early inscriptions an epigraphis from other parts of India.<sup>86</sup> It also occurs in the *Rājatarangiṇī*.<sup>87</sup> One explanation of the expression as first suggested by Sir W. Elliot,<sup>88</sup> refers to the privilege of using certain musical instruments conferred on vessels as a mark of honour. But Bühler, Kielhorn, Stein and others have explained it as denoting any five titles commencing with *mahā* (great).

Strangely enough, besides other lesser offices mentioned in Kāmarūpa inscriptions references do occur to five high offices styled *Mahā*. These are *Mahāśāmanta*, *Mahāmātya*, *Mahāsainyapati*, *Mahāpratihāra*, and *Mahādvārapati*. This fact naturally lends support to the view that in Kāmarūpa the expression *prāpta-pañca-mahā-sabda* was possibly used to denote an official who had successfully held these five offices, having been promoted from one to the other. Such capable and meritorious officials being rare, the title undoubtedly signified a very distinguished official.<sup>89</sup> Dr. Ghosal suggests that the group of titles prefixed

84. Grant of Balavarman, line 37.

85. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, p. 167.

86. I.A., IV, pp. 106, 180, 204; *Ibid.*, V, p. 251; *Ibid.*, XII, p. 95. *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 134, *Ibid.*, XIV, p. 202. It is proper to refer to the fact that the Mahājanaka Jātaka mentions the four great sounds.

87. IV, v. 140.

88. I.A., V, p. 231.

89. A Note on some Administrative Terms in Ancient India. K.A.C., V, pp. 30-32.

by *Mahā* evidently show an attempt to create a superior grade of officers over and above the ordinary ones. He further remarks that we have here an indication of deliberate effort to introduce more efficient and systematic organisation of the administrative machinery.]

#### 4. Local Administration

Before going to discuss the nature and duties of local officials, it is necessary to say a few words on the administrative divisions of the country. The term *rājya*, *deśa*, and occasionally *māṇḍala*, were employed to denote the kingdom as a whole. It consisted of a series of well-defined administrative units. The biggest division was the *bhukti* or province. In the Kamauli Grant Prāgjyotiṣa itself is called a *bhukti*.<sup>90</sup> As the country was then annexed to Gauḍa, it was legitimately so named. The next unit was the *Viṣaya* or district; though the exact expanse of territory covered by the term cannot be ascertained from the epigraphs. It is, however, certain that a *viṣaya* consisted of a number of villages or *grāmas*, for a *grāma* is usually described in the inscriptions as situated in a particular *viṣaya*. The *viṣaya* was furthermore named after its chief town. Our knowledge of the *viṣayas* of the kingdom is by no means complete. However, the following are recorded in the inscriptions: Candra-puri,<sup>91</sup> Dijjinnā,<sup>92</sup> Kalāṅgā,<sup>93</sup> Pūraji,<sup>94</sup> Trayodaśagrāma,<sup>95</sup> Hāpyoma,<sup>96</sup> Mandi,<sup>97</sup> Vādā.<sup>98</sup>

In early times the term *māṇḍala* does not appear to have been used as an administrative unit in the technical sense. It was a general term more or less corresponding to *deśa* or *rāṣṭra*, in fact, a region. The Kamauli plate, however, does refer to Kāmarūpa *māṇḍala*, which was in the Vādāviṣaya within the *bhukti* of Prāgjyotiṣa (*śri-prāgjyotiṣa-bhuktā kāmarūpamāṇḍale vādāviṣaye*). The Grant of Vallabhadeva, stated to have been issued in the Śaka year 1107, refers to the territory Hāpyacā as a *māṇḍala*.<sup>99</sup> It is

90. E.I., II, p. 353.

91. Nidhanpur Grant.

92. Grant of Balavarman, line 33; Śubhaṅkaropēṭaka Grant, line 31.

93. Śuālkuchi Grant of Raṇapāla.

94. Puṣpabhadrā Grant; Khonāmukhi Grant.

95. Bargāon Grant.

96. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.

97. Guākuchi Grant of Indrapāla.

98. Kamauli Grant.

99. E.I., XXVI, 1941, pp. 62-68.

also to be noted that the eastern Gaṅgā Copper-Plate of Ananta-varman (c. 8th century A.D.) refers to a learned Brāhmaṇa (donee of the grant) who hailed from Śrīgūḍika Agrahara in the Kāmarūpa-viṣaya (Kāmarūpa-viṣaya-śrīgūḍikāgrahāra). The *māṇḍala* therefore, appears to have included several *viṣayas* or districts. In addition to these broad divisions there were the smaller units, *pura* and *grāma*, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Regarding the general administration of these units, a fairly clear idea can be obtained from the records. The district or *viṣaya* was administered by a *viṣayapati*. He had an *adhikarana*<sup>100</sup> (office) at headquarters (*adhiṣṭhāna*). The office of the *Viṣayapati* included some of the following officers: *Nyāyakaraṇika*, *Vyavahārika*, *Sīmāpradātā*, *Kāyastha*, *Nāyaka*, *Koṣṭhāgārīka*, *Uparīka*, *Utkhitayita*, *Lekhaka*, *Śīsayīṭ*, *Sekyakāra*, and others. It appears that there was no real separation of civil and military, or executive and judicial functions, for we find a *Viṣayapati* also at the head of the revenue administration. This is evident from the fact that *Viṣayapatis* are invariably included among the officers who are directed not to interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of rents, free lands and villages granted by the crown. There were nevertheless officers who were occupied primarily with one side of the administration or the other.

The Nidhanpur Grant mentions the *Nāyaka Śrīkṣikunda*. *Nāyaka*, according to the *Arthaśāstra*, sometimes stands for *Nāgarīka*, the chief (Mayor) of a town or district;<sup>101</sup> but generally it is taken to mean a headman of a village. The *Śukranīti*, however, defines it as "lord of ten villages: *adhikṛto daśagrāme nāyakah sarvakīrtitah*.

Before discussion the function of the different departments of the *viṣayādhikarāṇa* (district administration) we should take notice of one of the most striking features of the constitution of a district *adhikarāṇa*, namely, the non-official element. In most of the records, it is stated that the subject of the grant was to be communicated not only to the state officials and to the Brāhmaṇas, but also to the leading men of the district (*jyeṣṭhabhadrāṇ*; *pramukhājñanapadāṇ*). Whether these terms refer to a popular representative body or merely to the elder members of the society, is not clear, nor is it clear how the communication was made. These

100. Cf. Monier Williams, *Dictionary*, p. 20. According to him *adhi-karma* means an act of placing at the head or subordinating government, supremacy, magistrate court of justice, etc. Also see E.J., VIII, p. 46, note 7.

101. *Arthaśāstra*, Bk. I, Chap. XII, and Bk. II, Chap. XXXVI.

repeated passages in the grants, however, do suggest that the *Viṣayapati* was in close touch with representative local bodies, who perhaps acted as a council of elders.<sup>102</sup>

Justice was administered according to the *Vedas*, *Aṅgas*, *Dharmaśāstras* and *Purāṇas*. The sources of law were the code of sacred laws (*Dharmaśāstras*), case-law (*Vyavahāra*), customs and tradition (*Caritam*) and the king's orders (*Sāsana*). The laws were generally expounded by the Brāhmaṇas. The chief officer of justice as recorded in the Nidhanpur Grant, was the *Nyāya Karanika*. The circumstances of the Nidhanpur Grant, further lead us to presume that the *Nyāya Karanika* was also an "adjudicator who had to inspect and decide if the boundaries of lands were properly marked out or not, and to settle all cases of dispute arising out of land." Another official closely associated with him was the *Vyavahārin* or *Vyavahārika*. The term *Vyavahāra* has been defined in the *Arthaśāstra* as "judicial administration and procedures in accordance with established conventions." The *Vyavahārin* would, therefore, mean an official who conducted judicial proceedings. The *Vyavahārin* mentioned in the list of officials in the Nidhanpur Grant, has been taken by K. L. Barua to mean a lawyer either engaged by the Brāhmaṇa donees to plead their case against the revenue officer assessing the land, or he was the king's lawyer responsible for the correct drafting of the grant.<sup>103</sup> *Kāyastha* was another official attached to the judiciary in the capacity of a clerk or secretary.<sup>104</sup>

It is now necessary to consider the evidence regarding the sources of revenue and fiscal administration. The principal sources of revenue may be classed under six heads :

1. Regular taxes.
2. Occasional taxes.
3. Commercial levies.
4. Fines.
5. Income from state properties.
6. Tribute from feudatories.

102. There is however, no indication of a *janapada* institution as described by Jayaswal in the *Hindu Polity*. Chaps. XXVII and XXVIII.

103. *Early History of Kūmarūpa*. *Vyavahārika* has been taken by some to mean representative representing industrial and commercial interest of the district.

104. Both in the *Mṛcchakatika* and in the Dāmodarpur Plates *Kāyastha* is used to denote an official

Among the regular taxes fall the *kāra* and *uparikara*.<sup>105</sup> Under occasional taxes mention may be made of *utkhetāna*, impost levied on special occasions, and "cāṭabhaṭapravēśam" or "exactations at the time of the arrival of regular and irregular military and police forces."<sup>106</sup> *Cauroddharāṇa* is also mentioned in a list of oppressions (*pīḍanas*) from which exemptions were granted to the donees in the inscriptions of Ratnapāla and Indrapāla, while the inscription of Balavarman specifies that the land assigned to the donee is not to be entered by a number of oppressors among whom are included the *cauroddharāṇika*.

Ghosal<sup>107</sup> takes the expression to mean a tax for maintenance of the village police, which, in the case of the land granted, was assigned to the donee, along with the land itself.

The Tezpur Rock inscription refers to the collection of taxes on merchandise carried in keeled boats.<sup>108</sup> It further mentions levying of *śulka* (toll) and the imposition of fines.<sup>109</sup> The Bargāon Grant tells us that the state derived considerable revenue from copper mines (*kamalākara*).<sup>110</sup>

We have also references to separate classes of officers who were responsible for collecting revenue from special sources. In the first instance, the revenue from agricultural land must have been collected through the heads of the territorial units such as *Viṣayapati*, *Nāyaka* and *Grāmika*. The chief officer of the revenue department was the *Auparika* or *Uparika* an officer primarily entrusted with the recovery of the *Uparika* tax, described in chapter IV. The duty of the *Aukhetika* was to collect *utkhetāna* impost. The epigraphs further mention two more officers who must have belonged to this department, namely, *Bhāndāgārādhi-kṛta*,<sup>111</sup> and *Koṣṭhāgārīlā*.<sup>112</sup> The former was employed to administer the affairs of the district treasury, and the latter was entrusted with the charge of the royal granary or store in the village, where *kara* in the kind of *dhānya* was collected. Another

105. *Infra*, Chap. IV.

106. *Infra*, Chap. IV.

107. On some fiscal terms occurring in the Ancient Indian Land Grants. *I.H.O.*, V op. 274-281.

108. *J.B.O.R.S.*, III, pp 508-14.

109. *Ibid.*

110. The expression may however, mean a lotus pond.

111. A large part of the Government revenue was collected in kind and so this title given to the officer in charge of the treasury is significant.

112. The word *Koṣṭha* occurs in the Guahati Grant of Indrapāla, which Hoernle takes to mean "granary".

officer mentioned in the Nidhanpur Grant was the *Simāpradātā*, whose duties appear to have been to mark the boundaries of holdings.<sup>113</sup>

Next in importance to the civil department and judiciary was the police department. The chief officials of this department were *Dāṇḍikā*, *Dāṇḍapāśika*, and *Cauroddharanīka*. Literally speaking, *Dāṇḍikā* was the officer in charge of a court, or sitting magistrate, responsible for judging and punishing criminals. The actual infliction of punishment, after the delivery of the judgment, was carried out by the *Dāṇḍavāśika*. He was so named either because he inflicted corporal punishment by using a noose or because he dragged the culprit in bonds to jail.<sup>114</sup> The *Cauroddharanīka* was the highest officer concerned with the apprehension of thieves,<sup>115</sup> robbers and brigands; his functions being the same as those of the *Cauroddhatr* or *Cauragrīha* of the Hindu law-books.<sup>116</sup> Among the police officers, are included certain semi-military officers, *Cāṭa* and *Bhāṭa*. Vogel thinks that *Cāṭa* is equivalent to the modern *cār* or "head of a parganā responsible for the internal management of a district for the collection of revenue and the apprehension of criminals." According to the same scholar *Bhāṭa*, which is usually compounded with *Cāṭa*, should be taken to mean "an official, subordinate to the head of a parganā."<sup>117</sup> Dr. Pran Nath on the other hand, takes the term to mean "policemen and soldiers."<sup>118</sup> The *Kālikā Purāṇa* in the section on *rāja-nīti* refers to the espionage system and lays down rules of engaging spies for different government departments.

From the inscriptions, it is evident that the *adhikarāṇa* had a well organised record department with scribes and clerks, who took down documents and preserved the archives.<sup>119</sup> In the Kanauli Grant, Kovida Gonandana is described as engaged in the post of *Dharmādhikāra*. It also appears that the department was

113. Nidhanpur Grant.

114. The expression is derived from *danda-pāśa*, that is to say, "rod and rope". Beni Prasad takes them to mean "judicial officers who are invested with the power of punishment." *The State in India*, p. 405.

115. According to Bhagavan Lal Indraji he was a thief-catcher. *Bombay-Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Pt. I, pp. 61-82.

116. Jolly: *Recht und Sitten* (translated by B. K. Ghose), p. 271.

117. *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Pt. I, pp. 131-132. Indraji interprets the expression as *cāṭān prati bhāṭah*, that is, soldiers against robbers, *I.A.*, IX, p. 175.

118. Pran Nath; *A Study in the Economic Condition of Ancient India*, p. 65.

119. v. 34.

connected with the issue of grants; for the king is stated to have delivered the *sāsana* to the Brāhmaṇa through Gonandana.

The writers were designated *Lekhakas*, and the documents (*karanya*) were kept in the custody of the registrar (*karanika*). The officer who drafted the document was called *Sāsayitṛ*.<sup>120</sup> The *Lekhaka* was writer to the Bench. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa* he should be well versed in different languages, learned in law and should write a neat and good hand, should possess presence of mind, express thoughts concisely and clearly, anticipate the intention of the speaker and know how to rule by means of subtly dividing parties, and be capable of dispensing justice equally between friends and foes, and should be loyal.<sup>121</sup> The *Garuda Purāṇa*<sup>122</sup> enumerates the following qualifications of a *Lekhaka*: memory, eloquence, wisdom, truthfulness, control over passions, and knowledge of the *Śāstras* (*medhāvī vākpatil pṛājñāḥ satyārādī jitendriyah | sarvaśāstrasaṁāloki hyeṣā sādhuḥ sa lekhakah*). It is plain that only men of high qualifications could aspire to the position of a *Lekhaka*.

The royal orders sanctioning grants of lands were as a rule engraved on copper-plates by *Sekyakāra* or *Takṣakāra* (engravers).<sup>123</sup> In most cases, conforming to the prescription of the law-books, these documents specify the following details: (i) the place where they were drawn up, (ii) the donor and his ancestors, (iii) the witnesses to the grant, (iv) the purpose of the grant, (v) the exact bounds of the estate dealt with, (vi) the recipient, (vii) the duration of the grant, (viii) the inheritance thereof, (ix) the inalienability, thereof, (x) any guaranteed immunity from taxation, etc., (xi) testification to future rulers, (xii) corroboration from law-books,<sup>124</sup>

120. Vasuvarna and Kāliyā were respectively the *Sāsayitṛ* and *Sekyakāra* of the Nidhanpur Grant.

121. *Sarva-deśikṣarūbhijñāḥ sarvaśāstra-riśārūndah  
lekhakah kathito rājñāḥ sarvādhikaraneśu vai  
śisūpetān asampurnān samaśrenigataṁ samān  
antarān vai līched yastu lekhakah sa varah mṛytah  
upāya-vākyā-kuśaloh sarvakāstrariśāradah  
vahvartharakta cālpena lekhakah syādbhṛgūttamah  
vaktubhi prāyatatrājño deśakālavibhāgavit  
anāsakto arpa bhaktō lekhakah syādbhṛgūndrahāḥ*

— Chap. 189.

122. Chap. 12.

123. Vinita was the *Takṣakāra* of the Puṣpabhadra Grant.

124. This corroboration is found only in the Nidhanpur Grant, *Kāmarūpa Śāsandvalī*, pp. 10-11.

(xiii) the king's name and title, (xiv) the names of the composer of the document and its engraver, (xv) the date.<sup>125</sup> The plates were held together by a copper ring. Attached to the ring is a massive seal, generally heart-shaped. Its area is divided into two parts, by a ledge running across it. In the triangular space above this ledge, is placed the figure of an elephant showing in high relief every line and feature of its great bulk *en face*. In the semi-circular compartment, below the ridge, is incised the king's name in letters of a size slightly larger than those of the grant. Round the edge of the seal runs a raised rim, nearly one inch in height, which protects the figure of the elephant. "The whole", in the words of Hoernle, "looks just like a heart-shaped box, without a lid."<sup>126</sup>

It is, therefore, plain that the administration consisted of civil, judicial, police, revenue and military departments. But whether or not there existed in our period a department to look after the religious institutions is not quite clear. In the Kainauli Grant<sup>127</sup> reference has been made to the Brāhmaṇa rājaguru Murāri, but whether he was the chief of all the religious officers of the state cannot be said with any certainty, though his close association with the king and his importance in the state ceremonies must have naturally given him a prominent place. The record of Harjjavarman<sup>128</sup> mentions the office of the Brāhmaṇādhikāri, which also suggests that religious institutions were in some way or other, controlled by state officials.

## II. MILITARY ORGANISATION

### 1. Officers

There was hardly a king who had not to undertake either a foreign expedition or to fight an enemy aggressor. The military organisation of the empire must therefore have been strong and efficient. It has been stated in a previous chapter that most of the emperors were themselves distinguished soldiers, and as such they ordinarily marched with the army as commander-in-chief. Under them were various grades of officers as well as feudatory

125. *Antiquities of India*, p. 129.

126. *J.A.S.B.*, LXVI, 1897, p. 114.

127. *Op. Cit.*

128. *Op. Cit.*, p. 51.

chiefs, who presumably commanded their own detachments. The commander-in-chief was known as *Senādhyakṣa*.<sup>129</sup> Sometimes he is given the title of *Sāmanta* or *Mahāsāmanta* but this presumably only when he is in his own right a feudatory chief.<sup>130</sup> Under the *Senādhyakṣas* were other lesser officers such as *Senāpati*, *Nāyaka*, *Rāṇaka*, etc. Besides these, there were special officers in charge of elephants, horses, and the navy.

The army was regarded as an important service to be organised and maintained in a condition of efficiency. It is often referred to as the "victorious" army (*vijaya śrī*). During this time, however, the ancient Indian conception of the army as consisting of four divisions (*caturaṅgabalam*) with chariots as an indispensable unit, had evidently ceased to exist. For in the epigraphs we find no reference to the chariot as a fighting arm. The Nidhanpur Grant is conclusive on this point; it mentions specifically elephants, horses, foot-soldiers, and navy (*mahā-nau-hastyuśrayattī*).<sup>131</sup> The inscriptions, however, present no definite information as to the composition and recruitment of the several branches of the army. The personnel of the army seems to have extended to all classes; even Brāhmaṇas were to be found in the fighting forces. The *Subhāṇ-karapāṭaka* and the Kamauli Grants both prove that Brāhmaṇas were experts in warfare. Vaidyadeva, as a general, is credited with having won two notable victories; one in the southern part of Vaṅga and the other "in the East".<sup>132</sup> As against the home contingents, foreigners were also employed. The *Mahābhārata* refers to the recruitment of the people of the bordering Mongoloid tribes. It says that Bhagadatta's army consisted of *Kirātas*, *Cinas* and many other soldiers dwelling on the marshy region near the sea.<sup>133</sup>

## 2. Navy

History is said to be largely the creation of geographical environments. The peculiarities of the terrain certainly have a great influence on the growth of national and regional characteristics. It is natural that a people living along the sea-coast, or in

129. Tezpur Rock Inscription, Op. Cit.

130. Ibid. The same inscription refers to *Mahāsāmanta Senādhyakṣa Śrīsucitta*.

131. v. 2.

132. Op. Cit.

133. *Sabhā P.*, XXV, XXXIII, *Udyoga P.*, XVIII. Nonnos refers to the *Kirātas* (Cirradoi) as a people used to naval warfare (McCredie, p. 199).

inland territories intersected by large and navigable rivers, should develop aptitude in the art of handling shipping. It is obvious that her waterways were of vital importance to Assam. Besides the sea-coast, to which the empire of Kāmarūpa once extended, Assam was largely dependent on her rivers for communication. Even today they form the main trade routes, both internal and external.

The inscriptions refer many times to the royal navy maintained by the kings. The Apshad inscription alludes to a naval engagement which took place between Suṣṭhiavarman of Kāmarūpa and the later Gupta king Mahāsena Gupta. The incident, says the epigraph, "is still constantly hymned on the banks of the river Lauhitya."<sup>134</sup> The scene of the engagement was obviously the Brahmaputra river. The Nidhanpur Grant also refers incidentally to a naval engagement, which was probably fought between Bhāskaravarman and Śaśāṅka, king of Bengal.<sup>135</sup> The Kamauli Grant records a glorious naval victory which Vaidyadeva won over his enemy of south Vaṅga, near the mouth of the Ganges.<sup>136</sup>

Hiuen Tsiang throws some light on these naval activities. Bhāskaravarman, according to this account, had a flotilla of 30,000 ships. When he became alarmed at having enraged Harṣa by refusing to part with Hiuen Tsiang, "embarking with the Master of the Law they passed up the Ganges together in order to reach the place where Śilāditya-rājā (Harṣa) was residing." When Bhāskaravarman arrived at the country of Kie-shu-ho-ki-lo (Kajurgira, Rajmahal) from Kāmarūpa, he held a conference there and "first ordered some men to construct on the north bank of the Ganges a pavilion of travel, and then on a certain day he passed over the river and coming to the pavilion, there placed the Master of the Law, after which he with his ministers went to meet Śilāditya-rāja on the north bank of the river."<sup>137</sup> Again, when Harṣa convened the great Assembly to receive gifts at Prayāga, "on the morrow the military followers of Śilāditya-rāja, and of Kunūrā-rāja (Bhāskaravarman) embarked in ships, and the attendants of Dhruvabhaṭa-rāja mounted their elephants, and so, arranged in an imposing order, they proceeded to the place of the appointed assembly."<sup>138</sup> That Bhāskaravarman's flotilla of boats not only

134. *Supra*, Chap. II.

135. *Supra*, Chap. II.

136. E.I., II, p. 351.

137. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, p. 172.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

sailed in the Ganges, but had access to the "southern sea" (Indian Ocean) is also evident. When Hiuen Tsiang decided to return to China Bhāskaravarman, desiring to help him on the way, said, "I leave the Master to his choice, to go or to stay; but I know not, if you prefer to go, by what route you propose to return. If you select the southern sea-route then I will send official attendants to accompany you."<sup>139</sup>

Vanamāla's inscription provides a fine description of the royal ships that were berthed on both banks of the river, near the capital city of Hārupeśvara. The boats were well carved and provided with various devices which made their movements fast and swift.<sup>140</sup> The officers in charge of them were the *Nau-vandhaka*, officers responsible for mooring, and *Nau-rajjaka*. *Nau-rajjaka* occurs in the Rock inscription of Harjjara and may mean a class of officers who were responsible for towing the boats by means of rope from the bank.<sup>141</sup>

The naval power of Assam persisted under the Ahoms, who in several naval engagements brought utter disaster to the Moghul army. Shihabuddin gives a detailed account of Assam's flotilla. He writes, "they (the Assamese) build war-boats like the *kosahs* (rowing boats for towing ghorahis or floating batteries, J.A.S.B., 1872, p. 57) of Bengal, and call them *bacharis*. There is no other difference between the two than this, that the prow and stern of the *kosah* have two (projecting) horns, while the head and base of the *bachari* consist of only one levelled plank; and as, aiming (solely) at strength, they build these boats with the heart of the timber (*galb-dar*), they are slower than *kosahs*. So numerous are the boats, large and small, in the country that on one occasion the news-writer of Gauhati reported in the month of Rainzan that up to the date of his writing, 32,000 *bachari* and *kosah* boats had reached that place or passed it." Further, he says, "that the people build most of their boats with the *cambal* wood; and such v. el. however, heavily they may be loaded, on being swamped do not sink in the water."<sup>142</sup> Besides this account, Muhammadan historians have left to us immense materials concerning the naval power maintained by the Ahom and Koc kings in later periods<sup>143</sup>

139. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

140. v. 30.

141. *The Dynastic History of Northern India*, I, p. 243, fn. 2

142. *J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. I, pp. 191-92.

143. Radhakumud Mukherji: *A History of Indian Shipping and Maritime Activity*, pp. 225 ff

## 3. War Elephants

From the epic period, elephants had an important rank in Indian armies. As Assam is noted for well-bred elephants,<sup>144</sup> elephant squadrons (*gojabala*) naturally formed an important division of the Kāmarūpa army. It is noted in the Śānti-Parva of the *Mahābhārata* that the distinguishing characteristic of the easterners was that they could fight skilfully with elephants (*prācyāmātaugayuddhesu kuśalāḥ*).<sup>145</sup> This was well illustrated by Bhagadatta, who fought bravely in the epic war with his elephant force.<sup>146</sup> The Nidhanpur Grant mentions elephants in the royal army of Bhāskaravarman (*sagajasya supratisthitakajakasya*).<sup>147</sup> Hiuen Tsiang says that it consisted of 20,000 elephants.<sup>148</sup> The pilgrim further observes that there was "wild elephants (in Kāmarūpa) which ravaged in herds, and so there was a good supply of elephants for war purpose."<sup>149</sup> Shihabuddin, who accompanied Mirjumla in his Assam invasion (1662 A.D.) reports that "large high-spirited and well-proportioned elephants abound in the hills and wilderness (of Assam)."<sup>150</sup>

That the chiefs of the neighbouring hill-tribes used to supply the Kāmarūpa monarchs with elephants is clear from the Bargāon Grant. Herein it is recorded, though the terms are somewhat quaint, that in Ratnapāla's capital "the heat of the weather was relieved by the copious showers of ruttish water flowing from the temples of his troops of lusty (war) elephants which had been presented to him by hundreds of kings conquered by the power of his arm...."<sup>151</sup>

As the tiger was to the Colas, the boar to the Cālukyas, the bull to the Pallavas, so the elephant was the natural symbol of Kāmarūpa.<sup>152</sup> Almost all the copper-plates, as well as the seals of Bhāskaravarman found at Nālandā, bear its impress.

144. "Elephants bred in countries such as Kalinga, Āṅga, Karuṣa, and the East", says Kautilyan, "are the best." By east, he no doubt means Kāmarūpa. Shamasastri, Tr., p. 54.

145. 101, 4.

146. *Supra*, pp 23 ff. See Fig

147. v. 21.

148. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, p. 173 Visnu Purāna refers to six thousand elephants of Naraka each having four tusks. Tr V P. 92.

149. Watters, II, p. 186.

150. J.B.O.R.S., I, p. 186

151. Lines 29 ff.

152. Jenkins wrongly identifies the figures on the seal of Vanamāla's Grant to be Ganeśa. It is actually an elephant head. *J.A.S.B.*, Vol. IX,

#### 4. Cavalry

On the other hand, cavalry did not seem to have occupied an important place in the army. This was probably due to want of good horses. The *Mahābhārata*, however, mentions that Bhagadatta presented Yudhiṣṭhīra with "horses of noble breed, swift as the wind (*ājāneyān hayān śrīghān*).<sup>153</sup> According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa took away twenty-one lakhs of Kāmboja horses belonging to Naraka.<sup>154</sup> From Vallabhadeva's Plates also we know that horses were imported from Kāmboja,<sup>155</sup> which has, indeed, always been famous for its breed. Kāmboja is generally identified with the North-Western Frontier. There is another Kāmboja has been identified with Cambay in the Bombay Presidency by N. Vasu<sup>156</sup> and J. C. Ghose.<sup>157</sup> Dr. B. R. Chatterji suggests its identification with modern Cambodia in Indo-China.<sup>158</sup> R. P. Chanda took Kāmboja to mean Tibet.<sup>159</sup> The Tibetan chronicle *Pag Sam Jon Zang* locates a country called Kain-po-tsa (Kāmboja) in the Upper and Eastern Lushai Hill tracts lying between Burma and Assam. Horses in large numbers appear to have been imported into Bengal and Assam from a certain town Karbattan, Kar-pattam or Karambatan in Tibet. For the *Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri* writes: "Every morning in the market of that city, about fifteen hundred horses are sold. All the saddle horses which come into the territory of Lakhnauti are brought from that country. Their roads pass through the ravines of the mountains, as is quite common in that part of the country. Between Kāmarūpa and Tibet there are thirty-five mountain passes through which horses are brought to Lakhnauti."<sup>160</sup> Watt says that the pure ponies of Manipur are the best of all Indian ponies, being possessed of wonderful powers of endurance and weight carrying capabilities.<sup>161</sup>

The Muhammadan writers of the later period note, however, that cavalry was not in use in Assam. According to them "the

p. 766 Karnauli Grant, however, bears the figure of Ganesa. This was because Vaidyadeva was a foreigner not directly descended from the line of the Kāmarūpa kings.

153. *Sahbhā P.*, L. I. 15-16.

154. Loc. Cit.

155. v. 12.

156. *Vāṅger Jātiya Itihāsa*, p. 172.

157. E.I., XXIV, 45.

158. *Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia*, pp. 278-279.

159. *Geuḍa-rāja-mālā*, p. 37.

160. Elliot and Dawson (ed): *The History of Muhammadan India*. II, pp. 311-312. Raverty, pp. 567-568.

161. *The Commercial Products of India*, p. 751.

Assamese are greatly frightened by horses, and if they catch one they 'hamstring it. If a single trooper charges a hundred well-armed Assamese, they all throw their hands up to be chained (as prisoners). But if one of them encounters ten Musalman infantry men he fearlessly tries to slay them and succeeds in defeating them."<sup>162</sup>

### 5. Forts

Writers on *Nitiśāstras* attach great importance to the construction of forts (*durga*). Kauṭilya considers the fort as one of the seven constituent elements of the state. He further classifies forts according to their location into four types, namely, *parvata* (hill-fort), *audaka* (water-fort), *dhanvana* (desert fort) and *vanadurga* (forest fort). Of these different varieties, Kauṭilya gives the preference to hill-forts and considers them as unassailable.<sup>163</sup> The *Kālikā Purāṇa* also lays much stress on the construction of forts and besides the above four, mentions two more types of forts namely, *bhūmi* (earth fort) and *vṛkṣa* (tree fort). A fortified town, according to the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, should be triangular in shape or circular or square-sized: *durgam kurvvan puram kuryyāttrikonam dhanurākṛtiṁ vartulañca catuskonam nānyathā nagaram caret*.<sup>164</sup> The geography of Kāmarūpa afforded an ideal opportunity for the construction of hill-forts. Judging from the location of the great cities, Prāgjyotiṣa, Hāruppeśvara and Durjayā, it is clear that the Kāmarūpa kings understood the necessity of fortifying the capital as a defensive measure. The *Mahābhārata* speaks of the strong fortress of Prāgjyotiṣa. "The environs of Prāgjyotiṣa," says the Viṣṇu *Purāṇa*, "were defended by nooses, constructed by the Muru (architect), the edges of which were as sharp as razors."<sup>165</sup> The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla says that the impregnable city of Durjayā was encompassed by a rampart, furnished with a strong fence which defended it, like the cloth which protected the king's broad chest.<sup>166</sup>

The remains of old fortresses have been unearthed by Colonel Hannay and Captain Dalton at different places in the province. One of the most interesting ruins of an ancient fortress is to be found at the foot of the Duffla hills, where the Buroi river de-

162. J.B.O.R.S., I, p. 191.

163. Shamasastri, (Tr.), Chap. III, pp. 54-55

164. Ch. LXXXIV, v. 112 ff.

165. Loc. Cit.

166. Op. Cit.

bouches into the plain. The fortification consisted of two stone walls, one on each side of the river. The walls were some 10 feet in thickness, their inside being constructed from ordinary river stones, the outside being built of hewn stones ranging from 12 to 14 inches in breadth. These bear distinct builders' marks on them. Behind the walls, there were deep ditches, and the river being inside, there was plenty of good water within the defences.<sup>167</sup>

Regarding siegework, the *Tabaqat-i-Nāsari* furnishes us with a very interesting account of the methods of warfare of the Assamese people. It states that after his Tibetan campaign when Muhammad-i-Bakhtyar retreated towards Kāmarūpa, throughout the whole route, neither a blade of grass nor a stick of firewood remained, as the inhabitants of the mountain passes had set fire to the whole of it. During their march, which lasted for fifteen days, not a pound of food nor a blade of grass could be found for cattle and horses, and the men had to kill their horses and eat them. Also, when they reached the stone bridge near the Brahmaputra, to their surprise they found arches of the bridge destroyed. Muhammad-i-Bakhtyar was, therefore, compelled to take shelter in a temple, as no boats or rafts were available to enable them to cross the river. As soon as the king (*Rāe*) of Kāmarūpa became aware of the helpless state of Muhammad and his army, and that they had sought shelter in the great idol temple, he gave orders for his people to assemble. They came in hosts and began to form a stockade all round it, by planting at a certain distance bamboo spikes after the usual fashion of making stockades in the country and afterwards weaving them strongly together with other canes. When the Muhammedan troops beheld what they had done, they made representations to Muhammad, saying, "If we remain like this we shall all have fallen into the trap of these infidels." Making a rush all at once, coming out from the temple and attacking one point in the stockade, they made a way for themselves, and reached the open plain. However, the Kāmarūpa soldiers followed in pursuit and succeeded in annihilating the whole force.<sup>168</sup>

167. Walter N. Edwards and Harold Mann: An Ancient Assamese Fortification and the Legends Relating thereto. *J.A.S.B.*, 73, Pt. I, pp. 254-261; W. N. Edwards: On Some Archaeological Remains in Bishnath, *J.A.S.B.*, Extra No. 1904, pp. 16-19. Lieut E.A. Rowlett: Report of an Expedition into the Mishme Hills to the north-east of Sadiya, *J.A.S.B.* XIV, (1845), pp. 494-95; Report by Lieut. E. J. T. Dalton..... Visit in the neighbourhood of the Soobansiri river, *J.A.S.B.*, XIV, p. 252.

168. Raverty, pp. 569-571; *Riyazu-s-salatin* (tr.) pp. 65-68.

## 6. Weapons of War

It appears from the epigraphs that the chief weapons of war, were *asi* (sword), *paraśu* (axe), *khatvāṅga* (spear),<sup>169</sup> *gadd* (mace) as well as the bow and arrow. The Doobi epigraph while recording the battle between Bhāskaravarman and the Gauḍa army mentions along with others the use of wheels (*cakra*) and javelins. The Plates of Vallabhadeva refer to the use of *churikā* (dagger) as a weapon of war.<sup>170</sup> The bow was the special weapon of heroes from early times and *Dhanurdhara* was a title of much distinction. In the Guākuci Grant it is enumerated as one of the thirty-two birudas of king Indrapāla;<sup>171</sup> and the Brāhmaṇa Himāṅka, as stated in the Śubhañkarapāṭaka Grant, earned royal patronage for skill in archery.<sup>172</sup> Vallabhadeva in his epigraph is credited with having mastered the science of archery.<sup>173</sup>

Words like *kavaca* and *varman* occur in the sense of war-like protections for the body of warriors.<sup>174</sup> The Bargāon Grant refers to the "cloth which protects the king's broad chest". *Dhvaja* (flag) and *patakā* (banners) were used in the battlefield. The names of the instruments of war music are not given in the inscriptions, although we have the expression *pañca-mahū-śabda*, which according to some, denote five different musical sounds.<sup>175</sup>

169. Even now the spears and bows used by the tribes of Assam are the finest of their kinds. *British Museum Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections*, 1910, pp. 51 and 85.

170. During the Ahom period, Barītop and Hilai, large and small guns, were largely used in war. "It is believed", remarked Tavernier, "that these people (Assamese) in ancient times, first discovered gun-powder and guns, which passed from Assam to Pegu, and from Pegu to China; this is the reason why the discovery is generally ascribed to the Chinese." He further mentions that the "gun-powder made in that country is excellent." Travel, II, p. 217.

171. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, p. 139.

172. v. 20.

173. v. 12.

174. It is interesting to note that "varman" appears to be a part of the name of many kings of the Puṣyavarman family.

175. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Seventh All-India Oriental Conference*, pp. 653 ff.

## CHAPTER IV

## ECONOMIC CONDITION

## 1. GRĀMA

From early times, the village in India has been the backbone of the economic life of the people, that is to say, the people lived a rustic life with agriculture as their main occupation. *Dhānya* or rice cultivation was their chief employment, and since it required co-operation in ploughing, irrigation, harvesting and cattle grazing, it necessarily demanded concentration and grouping of dwellings and so led to the formation of compact villages.<sup>1</sup> This compact form was convenient also for defence. Where, however, defence was not an issue, where plant culture was all-important, we often find scattered villages. The physical features, soil and climate, have also encouraged the aggregation of social units, apart from the ancient tribal ties or the strong Indian sense of family life which underlies the social organisation of all Indian village life.

The usual name for a village was *grāma*,<sup>2</sup> and the inscriptions plentifully record the existence of such *grāmas* as *Abhiśūravāṭaka*,<sup>3</sup> *Digdolavṛddha*,<sup>4</sup> *Chāḍī*,<sup>5</sup> *Khyātipali*,<sup>6</sup> *Devunikoñci*,<sup>7</sup> *Pidaka*, *Kroṣṇa*, and so forth. The village and place names of the province generally owe their origin from castes or tribe (*Tāntikuci*), geographical and physical features such as lakes (*Gangā pukhuri*), rivers (*Mangaldai*), hills (*Hāruppeśvara*), tree (*Guvāhāti*), religious character (*Vāsudevathāna*), flora (*Palāśabāri*) and fauna (*Tezpur*, which means a city abounding in snakes) of the country. All place-names are not of Sanskritic origin for they reveal traces of Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman elements. Thus, the place names indicate the traces of different races inhabitating the province at different periods of history. Dr. Kakati suggests that even the names like *Prāgjyotiṣa*, *Kāmarūpa*, *Kāmākhyā*, *Hārup-*

1. R. Mookerji: *Man and His Habitat*, p. 64.

2. Pran Nath: *A Study in the Economic Condition of Ancient India*, pp. 26 ff.

3. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 33.

4. Puṣpabhadra Grant: v. 21, 23.

5. Vallabhadeva's Plates.

6. *Ibid*: *Pali* or *Palli* means a row, i.e., a row of houses.

7. Puṣpabhadra Grant, v. 9.

peśvara are of Austric origin. Place names ending with -tā (Kāmatā), -ti (Śakaṭi) and -tul (Dharamtul) are undoubtedly Austric as they denote equivalents for earth in Austric languages. The Tibeto-Burman names appear mainly in the river names. The Bodos, a branch of the Tibeto-Burman speakers, who inhabited the country built their colonies mainly near about streams and therefore most of the names of rivers and places associated with these rivers are of Bodo origin. The Bodo equivalent for water are di and dui. The Bodos rechristened a river with a name of other origin by placing their own equivalent for water before it; e.g., di-hong, the name of a river, where Bodo di- was placed before an Austric -hong (water). The Ahom equivalent for water is nām: like the Bodos the Ahoms also put their equivalent for water before river names of other origins. They called the river Brahmaputra either ti-lao or nām-ti-lāo, where -ti is an Austric formation.<sup>8</sup> Other common terminations used for village names are -āṭī (Hāladhiāṭī), -kuci (Śuvālakuci), -gaḍ (Dibrugad), -garā (Raṅgāgarā), -juli (Dhekiyājuli), -pāṭa (Dakṣinapāṭa), -pārā (Ghagrāpārā), -bar (Kaliyābar), -bārī (Nalbārī), -marā (Śiyālamarā), -mukha (Chāparamukha), -hāṭ (Jorahāṭa), -hāṭī (Guvāhāṭī), etc.

The term grāma, however, was not used quite in the same sense as the English word "village", but would correspond more properly to "parish". Grāma meant, not merely the inhabited locality with its cluster of dwelling houses with gardens attached, but comprised the whole area within the village boundaries including not only the residential part (*vāstubhūmi*), but also the cultivable fields (*kṣetra*), land under pasturage (*go-cara*), the waste land that remained untilled, streams, canals, cattle-paths (*go-mārga*), roads and temples. The size of these grāmas varied. A large grāma included several wards called pāṭaka or pāṭa. Keilhorn has explained the term pāṭaka as meaning grāmaikadeśa, "a part of a village"; "outlying portion of a village", or "a kind of hamlet which had a name of its own, but really belonged to a larger village".<sup>9</sup> According to the Abhidhāna Cintāmani a pāṭaka is one half of a village: pāṭakastu tadardhe syāt.<sup>10</sup> That a pāṭaka was a smaller unit than a grāma is apparent from the Grant of Vallabhadeva, where along with five grāmas mention is made of two pāṭakas, Dosripāṭaka and Sonchipāṭaka.<sup>11</sup> The confirmed nature of ancient Indian society is indicated by the fact that each pāṭaka

8. Assamese, its Formation and Development, pp. 53-56.

9. I.A., XVIII, p. 135.

10. Bochtingk's Edition, p. 135.

11. E.J., V.

was not merely a collection of houses, it was a group of persons closely knit together by blood relationship, social intercourse, and economic co-operation.<sup>12</sup> In Assamese they are called *Cuburī*, *Hāpi*, *Pārā* and *Bāḍī*. Sometimes these wards were divided from one another by lanes, plantations of fruit trees or bamboo groves. This divisions of a village into caste wards was parallel with the existence of guild wards, that is to say, wards occupied by persons following the same occupation, forming corporations organised to regulate their professional business. The *Subhaṇkarapāṭaka* Grant refers to the different domicile of weavers (*caturvīṁśati tantrānāṁ bhūṣīmni* and *orāṅgi tantrānāṁ bhūṣīmni*).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla and the *Puṣpabhadrā* Grant of Dharmapāla both mention villages exclusively inhabited by Brāhmaṇas. The king and the state officials frequently made land endowments to create separate villages for the occupation of Brāhmaṇas, known as elsewhere in India as *Agrahāras*.

As the chief pursuit of the people was agriculture, the village site was generally placed along the river banks which made irrigation easy and the raising of crops more secure. In fact, most of the settlements mentioned in the epigraphs were on the banks of rivers like the Brahmaputra, Kauśikī,<sup>14</sup> Trisrotā,<sup>15</sup> Digurmā,<sup>16</sup> Jaugalla,<sup>17</sup> and so forth. The expression *sajala-sthala* used in connection with the donated land of the epigraphs and also other terms expressive of varied drainage system such as *Ganigīnikā*, *Jala*, *Garta*, *Dobā* indicate that the village fields were well supplied with water.

Speaking generally in terms of agriculture it also appears that, like all agricultural settlements in ancient India, Assam villages were divided into three parts; the village proper, arable and pasture lands. Around agricultural units (*vāstubhūmi*) or habitats, lay the waste lands and wood lands consisting of belts of fruit and other trees, shrubs and bamboo thickets, which might extend for some distance before the boundary of another village was reached. This waste was well demarcated as between village and village, but was held corporately and used generally like the wood and

12. The practice of allocating distinct quarters of a village to certain caste or professional group is evident from such village names as Kumāra-pārā, Ganakakuci, etc.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Nidhanpur Grant.

15. Grant of Vanamāla.

16. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

17. *Puṣpabhadrā* Grant.

fuel-wood and fruits in their season, and it played a great part in the life of the village. The *Kṣetrabhūmi* or arable land was usually a huge open field without any fencing. Each cultivator had one or more strip allotments in it, which were demarcated from his neighbours' holdings either by *kṣetrālis*, long narrow banks so constructed as to keep the irrigating or fertilising water in high-lying fields, or by *nalās*, drains or furrows made by the turn of the plough in order to carry off the water from the low-lands. That the *go-pracāra*, pasture land, was located along the village boundaries is evident from the expression : *vāstukedārasthala-jala-go-pracāravakarādyupeta*, which occurs in the inscriptions.<sup>18</sup> Thus *go-cara-bhūmi* was a very early institution. According to Kautilya an enclosure (for pasturage) at a distance of 100 *dhanus* (400 cubits) should be made around a village.<sup>19</sup> In the *Dharmaśāstras* too, we come across the same injunction (600 feet wide in the smaller communities according to Manu).<sup>20</sup> The pasture land, like the waste, was considered to be the common and undivided property of the village. *Go-vāṭa* or the cattle-path was also a public way.

## 2. PURA

Although people lived mainly in villages, cities known by the common names *pura*, *kaṭaka*,<sup>21</sup> and *nagara*, were by no means rare. They were the seats of the *adhikarana* (government), *skandhārvāra* (royal camp), or of *durga* (fort). Religious as well as commercial considerations too, were responsible for the creation of new cities or for the growth of a village into a town. Since the town owed its existence to trade, it had to be favourably located for transportation and communication, and if it was well situated, it grew large and prosperous. Our information regarding towns and cities that rose to importance during the mediaeval period is that they were on river banks and most conveniently located. The cities mentioned are *Prāgjyotiṣapura*,<sup>22</sup> *Durjjayā*,<sup>23</sup> *Hāruppeśvara*,<sup>24</sup> and *Kāmarūpanagara*.<sup>24a</sup> Of these *Prāgjyotiṣapura* was the ancient city. References to it are found in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Hari-*

18. Grant of Balavarman, line 36; Bargāon Grant, line 56, etc.

19. p. 172.

20. Manu, VIII, 237; Yājñavalkya, II, 167.

21. *Hāruppeśvaranāmani kaṭake*, Grant of Balavarman.

22. Grant of Balavarman, v. 5.

23. Bargāon Grant, line 40; *Gauhāti* Grant of Indrapāla, v. 19.

24. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 30.

24a. *Puṣpabhadra* Grant, v. 20.

ramśā in connection with Kṛṣṇa's killing of Naraka. In the *Sabhā-parva* Kṛṣṇa says, "Śisupāla, knowing that we had gone to the Prāgjyotiṣa city, set fire to Dvārakā."<sup>25</sup> In the *Vanaparva*, Arjuna, in praise of Kṛṣṇa says, "Thou didst destroy Maru's fetters, and slay Nisunda and Naraka; thou didst render the path to the Prāgjyotiṣa city safe again."<sup>26</sup> In the *Udyogaparva* Arjuna refers to Bhauma Naraka who carried off Aditi's two jewelled ear-rings to a very strong fortress city called Prāgjyotiṣa belonging to the Asuras.<sup>27</sup> The *Sānti-parva* refers to the "charming Prāgjyotiṣa city filled with all kinds of wealth".<sup>28</sup> In the *Harivamśa*, Kṛṣṇa's exploits in Prāgjyotiṣapura are described at length.<sup>29</sup> These references to the chief city of ancient Assam leave no very clear picture of its history but they undoubtedly make it clear that Prāgjyotiṣa city was great and prosperous.

Coming back to our epigraphs, we are informed by the Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla that the boundaries of the capital city Durjjayā "were encompassed by ramparts, furnished with a fence" and was "provided with brilliant troops of warriors".<sup>30</sup> The four sides of the city of Śonitapura were protected by huge flames of fire.<sup>31</sup> The cities were extensive in size and studded with magnificent buildings. The Bargāon Grant further says that in the city of Durjjayā, the impregnable, "the disc of the sun was hid from view by the thousands of plastered turrets which were rendered still whiter by the nectar-like smiles of the love-drunk fair damsels standing on them" (*samada-sundari-smita-sudhā-dhavalita-saudha-sikhara-sahsrāntarhita-taraṇi-mandalam*).<sup>32</sup> Prāsāda, the royal palace was an extensive building with well decorated apartments.<sup>33</sup> Other houses were called saudhas, which according to Acharya were "plastered, stuccoed on white-washed house, a great mansion, a palatial building, a palace".<sup>34</sup> Saudhas were

25. XLVII, 1509.

26. XII, 483.

27. XLVII, 1887-92.

28. ccxli, 12954-6.

29. cxi to cxxiii.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Caturpārītre bedi jale gaḍa bhayañkara  
Sata praharara patha bedi jale bahni  
Āre sikhā jale dui prahara ye tini.*

— Kumāra Harana, v. 194.

32. Bargāon Grant

33. *Yendulāpi satulā jagati viḍilāpi bhūrīkṛitabālā  
Pañktiḥ prasādāndām kṛtavicitrāpi sacitrā.*

— Grant of Balavarman, v. 14.

34. A Dictionary of Hindu Architecture, p. 642.

built either with stones or bricks and were plastered over with lime water as the word *Saudha* signifies. The word *dhavalita* in the Bargāon epigraph also denoted the same significance. The rows of white-washed houses of the city gave the appearance of a white mountain.<sup>35</sup> They had many window-openings known as *kundrakṣa* and *garākṣa* for they resembled a cow's eye. The inner walls were decorated by *Citrakaras* with beautiful forms,<sup>36</sup> and on the outer walls sculptures were artistically laid out.<sup>37</sup> The *Yogini Tantra* also gives a beautiful description of the sacred city Apunarbhava which has been identified with modern Hājo that contains the temple of *Hayagrīva Mādhava*.<sup>38</sup>

Civilization is often identified with the city. Within its walls were sheltered artists and philosophers, teachers and priests, nobles and merchants. Our cities were occupied by many hundred well-to-do people, adorned by religious preceptors and poets.<sup>39</sup> The cities offered opportunities to the energetic elements of the surrounding districts. Architects and artisans, sculptors and painters came to the city to build and decorate public buildings, market-places and temples. The streets of the cities were of considerable width and were gay with brilliant colours. For streets, we have

35. Yena śukla giri āche śāri īāri dakhilhāka anupama.

— Kumāra Harana

36. Babrubāha Parra, v. 26-32.

37. Vicitra kaṇṭa, kāti śilākunti gṛhara hāndhulā kāṇḍhi.  
tāte nānā pata, ghaṭa, naṭa, bhaṭa prakaṭi gaḍhīlā hāṭhī.  
bāgha ghoṅga siṁha nānā bihaṅgama śārī śārī sōjide.  
aneka putalī āche hāṭa tuli aṅgi bhaṅgi kari nāde.

— Rukmini Harana, v. 198.

38. Nilai raktaistathā śubhraiḥ prāśādairupasobhitam  
rakṣitam śastrasamghaīśca parikhābhīralamkṛtam  
sitai raktaistathā pītaīḥ kṛṣṇaīścanyaiśca varnakaiḥ  
dhūmraiḥ samīraṇairdhūmathaiḥ patākaiśca svalamkṛtam  
nityotsavapramuditam nānāvāditranīṣvaranam  
vīṇāveṇumydaṅgalīśca kṣepanībhīralamkṛtau  
devatāyatanairdīvyaiḥ prakṛṣṭodiyānamanditaiḥ  
pūjāvātīcyaratītaiḥ sarvataḥ samahāṇkṛtam...  
nānājalāśayaiḥścnyaiḥ padminiśatamāṇḍitaiḥ  
sarovarnairmanoñnaiśca prasannasalilāistathā  
kumudaiḥ puṇḍarikaiśca tathā nilotpalaīḥ rūbhail  
kadambaiścakravākaiśca tathātra jalakukkuṭaiḥ  
kāraṇḍavoltkarairhamsaistathāiva sthalacūribhīḥ  
erām nānāvidhai vṛkṣaiḥ puṇyaīrnānāridhai rāraiḥ  
nānājalāśayaiḥścnyaiḥ śobhitam tatsamantataḥ

— II. 9. 22-25, 28-31.

39. Bargāon Grant.

such expressions as *rāja-mārga*,<sup>40</sup> *catuspatha*, *rathyā*, *vīthī*,<sup>41</sup> etc. *Rāja-mārga* was the "broad street, the big road, the high way."<sup>42</sup> *Rathyā* was used in a technical sense. It refers to a street in which cars, chariots or other conveyances could ply, i.e. a vehicular street. It also means a larger street with rows of houses and buildings alongside; it also signifies a narrow shopping lane, five cubits wide according to Śukrācāryya. The eminent and the wealthy people moved in the streets on stately elephants and horses or carried in various kinds of litters.<sup>43</sup> Women of beautiful appearances and courtesans decked in profusion with all kinds of adornments and jewels were to be met with in the streets. The traffic on the streets was noisy and hawkers thronged the streets with various kinds of wares to sell. From city to city, roads ran throughout the country. Hiuen Tsiang refers to the great road to the east leading to China.<sup>44</sup>

Though the country was pre-eminently agricultural, it nevertheless possessed a wealthy trading and industrial class among the inhabitants of its towns. Trade and commerce flourished with cities as their centres. Frequent mention is made in the records of towns having various kinds of *vipanis*, or shops, including jewellery shops.<sup>45</sup> The goldsmiths' shops displayed wonderful and inexhaustible articles. There were pearls and jewels, rings and bracelets flashing with precious stones. These attracted people from far and near.<sup>46</sup> Assamese merchants were full of enterprise and grew in wealth and prosperity.

The towns also offered many amenities in the form of *ārāma*<sup>47</sup> and *upavana*,<sup>48</sup> that is, public parks or pleasure groves, where musk-deer and peacocks moved about freely, and numerous lotus-covered lakes with "prattling flocks of love-drunk females of the kala-hamsa ducks."<sup>49</sup> *Vāpi Dighī*, *Puṣkarī* and *Sarovara* abounded in the city. *Vāpi* and *Puṣkarī* have been explained as tank, well or reservoir of water.<sup>50</sup> *Sarovaras* mentioned in the early texts were artificial lakes. They were large and big with trans-

40. Grant of Vanamāla.

41. Puṣpabhadrā Grant.

42. A Dictionary of Hindu Architecture, p. 524.

43. Grant of Vanamāla.

44. Watters, vol. II, p. 186.

45. Bargāon Grant, v. 14.

46. Bargāon Grant.

47. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 28.

48. Grant of Balavarman, v. 6.

49. Bargāon Grant.

50. A Dictionary of Hindu Architecture, p. 543.

parent water and with steps set with jewels. The banks were artistically lined with columns of *Campaka*, *Baka*, *Bandūli*, and other flowering trees while the water was filled with both white and blue lotuses and water lilies. The lakes were used as sporting places by aquatic birds such as *Koḍhā*, *Kaṅka*, *Vaka*, *Cāṭaka*, and *Rāja-hamīsa*, which enjoyed the roots of the lotus plants. Flower gardens and orchards of various sorts were elaborately laid out. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* which describing the objects dear to Kāmākhyā and Tripura gives the following long list of flowers : *arka*, *aparājitā*, *asoka*, *añjalikā*, *aṭarūṣa*, *āmrataka*, *utpalā*, *karavīra*, *karnikāra*, *kadamba*, *karuṇa*, *kunda*, *kurunṭaka*, *kumuda*, *kubja*, *ketakī*, *kokanada*, *khadira*, *cakra*, *jāti*, *jabā*, *jhintī*, *tagara*, *tilaka*, *drona*, *dohada*, *narkārikā*, *nameru*, *padma*, *palaśa*, *pāṭala*, *puṇḍra*, *bakula*, *bijapura*, *banduka*, *bhaṇḍila*, *madana*, *mandāra*, *mālatī*, *mallikā*, *mādhavī*, *yūthikā*, *rocana*, *lodhra*, *vāṇa*, *vanamāla*, *śālmala*, *śīriṣa*, *śāmī*, *śobhāñjana*, *śāla*, *sindurārā*, *śimantī*, *surabhi*.<sup>51</sup> In the early Assamese literature this traditional list of flowers had been reduced to a set list of forty-two only. The Apsad stone inscription of Ādityasena, attributed to the seventh century A.D. reveals how siddhas in pairs, woke up after sleeping in the shade of the vines in the betel-gardens which bloomed on the banks of the river Lohitya : *Lohityasya tateṣu śitalataleṣu utphullanāgadrumacchāya-supta*.<sup>52</sup> The city in Prāgjyotiṣa according to the grant of Balavarman was adorned with groves of areca palms wreathed in betel-vines and by orchards of black aloe-wood hung with cardamon creepers (*tāmbūlavalli-parinadupagam kṛṣṇāguru-skandha-nivesitatailam*).<sup>53</sup> It is believed that the abundance of betel-vine gave Prāgjyotiṣapura the present name Gauhati (rows of betel-nuts). These orchards were irrigated by channels drawn from rivers or tanks. Hiuen Tsiang noticed that "water led from the river or from banked-up lakes (reservoirs) flowed round the towns" of Kāmarūpa.<sup>54</sup>

51. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, 75/55-64.

The Yagini Tantra mentions the following :—

*ṛtukālodbhavniśceva mallikājātipupakaiḥ  
sitaraktastathā purpairnīlaiḥ padmaiśca pāṇḍuraiḥ  
kimṇukatagaralśceva jabḍakanakacampakaiḥ  
vakulaiśceva mandāraiḥ kundapuṣpaiḥ kurunṭakaiḥ  
dhaturakādiyuktaiśca bandhūkāgastiyasambhavaīḥ  
madanaiḥ sindhuvāratśca durvāṇkuradalaistathā*

— II. 7. 191-193.

52. *Op. Cit.*

53. v. 5.

54. *Buddhis: Records of the Western World*, II, p. 196.

The towns were adorned with many temples. The temple was the centre of many attractions and amusements. It served many more purposes than that of worship. Here village meetings were held, festivals were celebrated, theatrical performances were shown, and in it took place regular dancing by temple-women.<sup>55</sup> The temples were surrounded on all sides by different species of trees for their association with some gods or goddesses. This no doubt largely enhanced the beauty of the landscape and offered shade but also conferred a certain sanctity on the area and special blessings on the plants.

### 3. THE LAND SYSTEM

#### (i) Ownership and Types of Land

In matters of land, the Kāmarūpa kings, following the general northern Indian tradition, claimed that all land belonged to the crown. Not only did the king exercise this right over lands, cultivated or waste, but he extended his prerogative of ownership over all woods, forests, ferries, mines, etc. But the recorded procedure of granting land to the Brāhmaṇas, as described in the copper-plates, raises a very important issue regarding the Indian theory of crown ownership. In certain cases, the king, when giving away land, communicated the order not only to the state officials concerned but to the Brāhmaṇas and to leading men of the district (*Samupasthitabrahmanādi.....pramukha jānapadān.....yathā-kāla-bhāvinopi sarvān sammānanāpūrvvammānayati bodhayati samādīsati ca*).<sup>56</sup>

In view of the theory of crown ownership, it is difficult to explain why in alienating land, the king should notify the Brāhmaṇas as well as the leading men (*pramukha-jānapadān*). Some scholars have seen in it, as noted before, an indication of the fact that the villagers, either individually and corporately possessed some kind of rights over the unoccupied lands within the demarcated areas of their village. However the bulk of evidence proves the contrary, that is, the king was the sole owner of the soil. He could alienate land at will. Moreover it appears that he could resume at will land so given, even if it had been given originally as a perpetual grant. For this reason, in the Nidhanpur grant redemption is expressly forbidden with dire imprecations.

55. See Chap. V.

56. Grant of Balavarman.

The recorded grants have to do with two main types of land, cultivable (*kṣetra*) and uncultivable or waste land (*khila*).

The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla also contains the expression *apakṛṣṭā bhūmi*, which Hoernle takes to mean "inferior land".<sup>57</sup> There is also another class of high-lying land called *vāstu* or *bhitti-bhūmi*, building ground which was set apart for the dwellings of the villages, and that lay within the accepted village area. This type of land is now called *Basti* or home-stead land. The other types are now known as *rūpit* or land on which the transplanted rice called *sāli* is grown; *bāo-talī* or land growing *bāo* rice; and *pharingati* or land growing dry crops such as mustard and *āhu* paddy.

### (ii) Land Tenure

The inscriptions do not give much information as to the system of land tenure prevalent in the period. Most of the epigraphs record only transactions of a religious character, and it is therefore not easy to say how far the conditions described in them are representative of the general features of private tenure. It is, however, certain that the major part of the cultivable land was held by the agriculturists who farmed it; as now in the greater part of India, the independent peasant proprietor (*ryotwārī*) enjoyed small holdings, sufficient for his wants. The right of occupation was hereditary, subject to the payment of dues and taxes to the king's officers or representatives.

The set terms occurring in the land-grants, though applied in a different context, do illustrate to some extent the conditions of individual land-tenure. In laying out the conditions of the grant, the Nidhanpur Grant says: "Let it be known to you (all) that the land of the mayūraśālmalāgrahāra granted by issuing a copper-plate charter by king Bhūtivarman has become liable to revenue on account of the loss of copper-plate.....having issued orders for making a copper-plate grant the land has been awarded to the Brāhmaṇas who had been enjoying the grant already in the manner of *bhūmicchidra* so that no tax is levied on it."<sup>58</sup> This suggests that there were many *nyāyas* or regulations relating to land tenure besides *bhūmicchidra*. This *bhūmicchidra* system is known from the time of Kauṭilya, who states that in conformity with this law land was given by the state for making pasture grounds and culti-

57. J.A.S.B. Pt. I, p. 118, for a different interpretation see *Kdmariपा Śasanāvalī*, p. 107, f.n.7.

58. Line 53.

vable tracts, forest-plots for Brāhmaṇas for raising soma-plantations, game-preserves or forests, manufactories for preparing commodities from forest-produce and collecting raw materials from the forest.<sup>59</sup> It was obviously a wide term but it occurs constantly in Yādavaprakāśa's Vaijayantī and in the Vaiśyādhvāya, where it is explained as "Kṛṣṇayogya bhūḥ," implying a fissure (furrow) of the soil."<sup>60</sup> As used in the Nidhanpur Grant, it has been taken by Bhattacharya to mean uncultivated lands, or such land as was deemed useless for cultivation, where, in fact, no corn would grow.<sup>61</sup> In the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva we have also the expression : bhūcchidrāñca yatkiñcitkaragrāhyām, meaning, "bhūcchidra (uncultivable) land from which no revenue is to be realised."<sup>62</sup> Hence the bhūmi or bhūcchidrāñya suggests that no assessment is to be made on the land covered by the grant, just as if it remained waste land, which was not assessable. Dr. Ghosal endorsing this interpretation, remarks that under this nyāya land was granted with such right of ownership as was acquired by a person making barren land cultivable for the first time.<sup>63</sup> Dr. Barnett, however, interprets the expression to mean that the grantees holding lands became merely tenants at will.<sup>64</sup> But as the Nidhanpur Grant clearly shows that the lands granted under this tenure were given in perpetuity, not only to one person but to his heirs, "as long as the moon, sun and earth shall endure" (ā-candrārka-kṣitisaṃkālam),<sup>65</sup> Dr. Barnett's interpretation does not seem tenable. It should be noted that in these grants donees were guaranteed relief from specified taxes and the ownership of the mineral resources<sup>66</sup> of the area granted. A further guarantee was also given, that state officers were neither allowed to interfere with the enjoyment of the land thus granted, nor to confiscate it.

The other important system of land tenure was nividharma or apradādharmā, as we find in the Dāmodarpur Plate.<sup>67</sup> It was a peculiar kind of tenure by which the purchaser, or the person or institution on whose behalf the land was acquired by purchase, obtained the right of perpetual personal enjoyment, but not the

59. *Arthashastra*, Bk. II, Chap. II, Tr. pp. 52-53.

60. E.I., IV, p. 138, f.n. 2; also I.A.I., p. 46.

61. Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, p. 33, f.n. 1, see also K. M. Gupta : Note on Bhūmīcchidrāñya in I.A. LI. pp. 77-79. cf. Zamin-i-ufstādan of the land-grants of Muslim India.

62. E.I., II, p. 349.

63. *Hindu Revenue System*, p. 185; I.H.Q., V, p. 385.

64. J.R.A.S., 1931, pp. 165-66.

65. Line 33.

66. Śubhārikarapāṭaka Grant, line 35.

67. E.I., XV, pp. 130 ff.

further right of alienation by sale or mortgage. In other words, the state, although it granted plots of land from the unappropriated waste, still reserved to itself certain rights over the property, and the purchaser or the donee was allowed only personal rights over the land. The value to the state of such grants is evident, for they increased the cultivated area without permanently depriving the revenue of the increased value of the land.

### (iii) Special Land Tenure

A special kind of beneficiary tenure was connected with *brahmadāya* or lands granted to Brāhmaṇas for religious purposes. Such grants were governed by special rules laid down in set terms in the epigraphs. *Brahmadāya* is defined as "a grant or perquisite appropriated to Brāhmaṇas."<sup>68</sup> Such grants usually took the form of land, either small fields or whole villages. The latter were generally known as *agrahāras* or *śrotriyas*, which were granted to Brāhmaṇas either as reward for their learning or to enable them to impart religious and secular knowledge to the younger members of the community. If the donee happened to be a single individual, the village granted was called *ekabhoga* or the "individual enjoyment." If, on the other hand, the donees were several, the village granted was known as *gaṇabhoga*, or the land enjoyed by a group or corporation.

The age-old tradition of the country has been to regard these pious endowments as rent-free. They were given in perpetuity and were furthermore accompanied by the assignment of other revenues accruing to the crown. Resumption was expressly forbidden with dire imprecations. The Nidhanpur Grant records that Bhūtivarman granted the Mayūra-śalmala-agrahāra which owing to the subsequent loss of the inscribed plates, became liable to revenue (*karada*). Therefore his great-great-grandson Bhāskaravarman issued a fresh charter regranting the land to the families of the original donees. The circumstances under which the Nidhanpur Grant was made show that the loss of charter which registered endowments was a serious matter and could invalidate the intended freedom from taxation, unless, of course, a fresh charter was granted renewing the privilege. There must, therefore, have been a periodic inspection of grants and titles.

It is not always clear in these grants whether the donee received only the state-share of the produce and other state-rights in the land granted or the real proprietorship of the land itself, that

<sup>68</sup>. H. H. Wilson: *Glossary*, p. 92.

is an out and out gift of both the soil and the revenue. It is, however, probable that the bulk of these grants conveyed already existing villages, and merely transferred to the grantees the right, to receive the revenue, that is to say, the royal share of the produce. They did not deprive any existing individual householder of his rights or make him suffer in anyway. Where, however, the grant was to colonise uninhabited land, the proprietary title was in fact, conceded, as there were no antecedent private rights to interfere. Succeeding generations had therefore double title to such land not only as inheriting specifically granted land, but as the heirs of those who came into possession of these lands by rights of first cultivation.

Besides grants made to Brāhmaṇas, the epigraphs record gifts of land to temples and for various special religious purposes, by kings, queens, and state-officials. Though there are no references to the rights attached to such grants, such grants probably resemble the *Brahmadāna* (grants made to Brāhmaṇas) noted above. These institutional grants were managed by the authorities of the temple concerned, subject to the supervision and control of the state. The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla mentions that the king repaired the temple of Hāṭnkeśvara Śiva, and made a gift to it consisting of villages, men, prostitutes, and elephants.<sup>69</sup> Vallabhadeva's plates record the establishments of a *bhaktaśālā*, almshouse, in the proximity of a temple of Mahādeva, situated in the Hāpyacā-maṇḍala to the east of Kirtipura. For the support of this widely famous almshouse Vallabhadeva, in the Śaka year 1107, granted seven villages, namely, Chādi, Devunikoñci, Sajjāprīgā, Vaṅgaka, Samśrahikoñcikā Doṣṇipāṭaka with their woods and thickets, "with the people in them, with their water and land" (*Sa-jhāṭa-viṭapagrāmān sajanām sajalasthalān dadau*).<sup>70</sup>

In later periods, the Ahom kings also made considerable grants of land to be held revenue-free (*lākherāj*) for religious and charitable purposes. The different types of *lākherāj* or rent-free estates are classified as: (1) *Brahmottara*, lands given to Brāhmaṇas, (2) *Dharmottara*, lands for the support of religious institutions, (3) *Devottara*, lands for maintaining the worship of gods. *Devottara* estates are again of two kinds — *bhogadānī* and *paikān*. The *ryots* on the former are bound to supply one daily ration (*bhog*) to the temple for each unit of land. The *ryots* on the latter are required to render certain somewhat vague kinds of service.

69. v. 24.

70. *Ibid.*

## (iv) Land Revenue and Burdens on Land

The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva lays down, among other things, that the two villages Śāntipāṭaka and Mandara, which were granted to a Brāhmaṇa, "were to be held according to the law of the uncultivated land (*bhūucchidranyāyena*)", "to be provided with all sources of revenue (*sarvvāyopāya-samyuktam*) and to be immune from taxes and their contingencies (*karopaskaravajjitaṁ*)".<sup>71</sup> This obviously points out that there were several types of imposts and burdens on the land. The exact nature of these different sources of revenue is not known, but they are referred to in the epigraphs in general terms as *kara*, *uparikara*, *utkhetana*.

The Nidhanpur Grant, noticed above, refers to the taxation of the Mayūra-śālmalāgrahāra subsequent to the loss of the royal charter; *tāmrapaṭṭābhāvāt-karadam iti*.<sup>72</sup> *Kara*, therefore, stands for the general tax levied on land periodically. It is synonymous with the *bhāgakara*, land tax, of the *smṛtis*.<sup>73</sup> generally referred to as one-sixth of the produce in the inscriptions of the Gupta period. The fiscal term *uparikara*, according to Fleet means a "tax levied on cultivators who have no proprietary rights in the soil".<sup>74</sup> Dr. Barnett considers it to be a counterpart of the Tamil expression *mel vāram*, that is the Crown's share of the produce.<sup>75</sup> Dr. Ghosal, on the other hand, objects to this interpretation on the ground that the ancient Indian land grants have other and distinct terms to signify "the Crown's share of the produce"; the most common of these being *bhāga-bhoga-kara* and *hiranya*. Furthermore, he points out that in the grants of Balavarman and Ratnapūla the officers charged with the collection of *uparikara* and *utkhetana* are treated among the list of oppressors (*upadravakārin*) who were forbidden to enter the donated land. Dr. Ghosal contends, therefore, that "the *uparikara* was not a regular item of revenue like the Crown's share of produce", but was "an irregular tax which bore harshly on the cultivator".<sup>76</sup> However, Fleet's view seems more plausible on account of its literal interpretation of the term. The word *uparikara* appears to be a combination of the two words *upari* and *kara*. The word *upari* as preposition means above or over and it obviously

71. E.J., 11, p. 353.

72. Line 51.

73. Gautama, X, 24-27; Manu, VIII, 130, 276; Kautilya, Bk. V, Chap. 2, 271.

74. C.I.I., III, p. 98; I.A. VII, p. 66.

75. J.R.A.S. 1931, pp. 165-66.

76. I.H.Q. V, pp. 384-85; Hindu Revenue System, pp. 210-11.

C. 11

implies that it was a charge imposed on those cultivators who were tenants at will and had no proprietary rights in the soil, viz., those who were literally above the obligation of hereditary proprietorship, and as such they would pay a higher rate of tax. In this connection, it should be noted that the revenue thus arising from uparikara must have been considerable, for a separate officer known as *Auparika* or *Uparika* was entrusted with the recovery of this revenue.<sup>77</sup>

The nature of some of the other kinds of burden attached to lands can be ascertained from the inscriptions of Balavarman and Ratanpāla. As has been noted, the Nowgong Plates of Balavarman contain the clause that the land granted was not to be disturbed by a number of possible oppressors, comprising, among others, the queen, the princes, the royal favourites, the chamberlain matron, persons tethering elephants and mooring boats, trackers of thieves, police officers and so forth (*rājñi-rājaputra-rāṇaka-rājavallabha-mahalakapraudikā - hastibandhika - naukabandhika - cauradharanika - dāṇḍika - daṇḍapāśika - auparika autkheṭika - cchitravāsā - dynipadrara-kārinām-praveśā*).<sup>78</sup> It therefore shows that besides the regular taxes, there were a number of customary burdens upon agricultural lands. Such burdens were concerned not only with the supply of food on the occasion of members of the royal family and royal officer's visiting and camping (*chatravāsa*) in the locality, but also with the grazing of animals, the tethering of elephants and the mooring of boats, apparently in the course of state service.<sup>79</sup>

The system of land revenue prevalent under the Ahom kings was however, of personal service. The whole of the adult male population was divided into bodies of three men called *gots*, each individual being styled a *pāik*. One *pāik* out of the three was always engaged on labour for the state, and while so employed, it was supported by the remaining members of the *got*. In return for his labour each *pāik* was allowed two *purās* (nearly three acres) of the best rice land free of rent. If personal service was not required, he paid two rupees instead.<sup>80</sup>

#### (v) Survey of Land

The Nidhanpur Grant points clearly to the existence of an organised system of inspection and survey of revenue and land.

77. Grant of Balavarman, v. 25.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*: Bargāon Grant.

80. Gait: p. 240.

The system of measuring land and demarcating holdings was done by officials of the state revenue department. The epigraphs reveal that the endowed lands were measured in the presence of the state officials; and whenever any plot of land was given away, accurate details had to be furnished not merely as to the boundaries concerned, but as to all matters relating to the economic use and value of the land, most of the grants definitely stating the amount of *dhānya* (paddy) yielded by the land granted. This proves that the revenue department not only surveyed and measured the land, but compiled and kept current records of the produce and revenue derived from each field of every cultivated holding (*prataya*). Therefore, the ownership of a holding involved the registration of titles and tenures. The survey and resurvey of lands was undertaken during the time of the Ahom rule. A survey of the country was carried out and a census was taken of the population in the reign of Cakradvaj Simha (1663-1669 A.D.). A detailed survey, based on the land measurement system of the Mohammedans was started in the reign of Gadādhar Simha, continued in the reign of Rudra Simha and Siva Simha and completed in the reign of Rudra Simha (1744-1751). The Register, called *Perā kākāt* was prepared which contained lists of all occupied lands, except homesteads, with their areas and particulars of all rent-free estates.<sup>81</sup>

In earlier times, each *prataya* was marked on eight sides (*aṣṭasimā-paricchedaṇī*). The details of such boundary surveys are indicated in the same Nidhanpur Plate wherein the Mayūra-sāmalāgrahāra had "on the each, the dried Kauśika, on the south-east, that very Kausika marked by a pillar of hewn fig tree, on the south a pillar of hewn fig tree, on the southwest the dried river-bed marked by a cut down fig tree, on the west now the boundary of the dried river-bed, on the north-west a potter's pit and the said dried river-bed, bent eastward, on the north a large Jātali tree (i.e. *Bignonia suaveolens*), on the north-east the pond of the tradesman Khasaka and the aforesaid dried Kauśika."<sup>82</sup> These demarcating marks were essentially the same as recommended by the *Dharmaśāstra*.<sup>83</sup> A careful analysis of the epigraphs will show that the boundaries generally included : (i) mounds, and hills, (ii) trees of different kinds, (iii) pits and trenches (iv) ponds, tanks, channels, (v) river-banks and river-beds (vi) wells (vii) temples, (viii) enclosures and such other

81. Gait: *History of Assam.*

82. Lines 126-32.

83. Manu, VIII, p. 246-48.

permanent objects. Where, however, no natural boundary mark existed, the new holdings were delineated by planting trees or setting up wooden or bamboo pillars. The Śubhāṅkara-pāṭaka Grant mentions the planting of a śālmali tree (*ropita-śālmali-vṛksah*) and *rāṇśa-vṛktih* (bamboo-post) as a boundary mark.<sup>84</sup> It may be noticed here that the custom of naming fields seems to have been prevalent in early times as it still is in many villages of the province. Some of the fields that were distinguished by their proper names are Bhavisābhūmi,<sup>85</sup> Pandarībhūmi,<sup>86</sup> Olinḍābhūmi,<sup>87</sup> Kañjiyabhūmi,<sup>88</sup> etc.

#### (vi) Measure of Land

The system of land measurement was probably based on *drona* and *nala* measures. Both these are still the common ways of measurement of land in Assam. *Drona* or *dronavāpa* was the area on which one drona of seeds could be sown; a *nala* was the length of a reed. The Silimpur Grant of the time of Jayapāladeva uses the two terms *pāṭaka* and *drona* in giving the measurement of land, and mentions that a certain landed property yielded an income of 1000 coins (*daśa-śatodaya-śāsanam ca*).<sup>89</sup> *Pāṭaka* seems to be the largest unit of area as is evident from the reference in the Gunai-ghar Grant of Vainyagupta (507 A.D.)<sup>90</sup> which states that *Pāṭaka* was equivalent to forty *dronas* or *dronavāpas* in area. In modern Assam, a *nala* is equal to fifteen feet, and a *drona* or more commonly *dona*, to one *bighā* of land. The area of each field is even calculated by measuring the four sides with a *nala* or bamboo pole 12 feet long, and multiplying the mean length by the mean breadth.

### 4. AGRICULTURE

#### (i) Food Crops

The major part of the cultivated land of the village was devoted to growing rice, which is still the staple food crop of the province.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Bargāon Grant.

<sup>86</sup> Guākuci Grant.

<sup>87-88.</sup> Śubhāṅkarpāṭaka Grant.

<sup>89.</sup> Op. Cit., v. 22.

<sup>90.</sup> I.H.Q., VI, 1930. The plates are found at Gunai-ghar, about eighteen miles to the north west of Comilla, Bengal. It records a grant of land by Mahārāja Vainyagupta from the victorious camp of Kripura in the year 188 (507-8 A.D.).

It has previously been noticed that the revenue of the land was estimated in measures of *dhānya*, or rice yielded by it. This obviously points to the general prevalence of payment of the revenue in kind. Rice was and even to-day is the chief means of barter in the villages. Rice falls under three main heads, *sāli*, *bāo*, *āhu*. *Sāli* is transplanted winter rice, on low lying land. The long *bāo* is stemmed rice sown broadcast mainly in marshes with deep water. *Āhu* also is usually sown broadcast in the springtime and is grown in high lands under two different sets of conditions. The springtime-sown paddy gives coarse rice. The *Yogini Tantra*, therefore, forbids its offering to the gods : *vasante ropitanī dhānyanī yatnena ca vivarjjayet*. The same text enumerates nearly twenty varieties of rice.<sup>91</sup> Early Assamese literature abounds in descriptions of a hundred varieties of paddy. Some names are : *kharikā-jahā*, *māṇikīmadhūrī*, *jāhiṅgā*, *mālbgog*, *bagitārā*, *cakowā*, *suwāgmaṇi*, *kapau sāli*, *raṅgā sāli*, *māguri*, *sāgar sāli*. A variety of rice called *bokā dhān* is consumed uncooked. It is soaked in water until it becomes soft in which state it is taken with curd and molasses. This is a favourite meal on festive occasions among the peasantry throughout the province. The hill people usually resort to the *jhumi* method of cultivation. Forest lands are cleared by the process known as *jhuning*, that is, trees and bamboos are cut and fire is applied to burn them. The land is not hoed up, but holes are made at intervals with a sharp, pointed stake, and seeds are placed in each. The planting of paddy and millet is even simpler, for it is sown broadcast in the ashes of the burnt jungle, and without any preliminary turning up of the soil.<sup>91a</sup> The *Bargūon Plates* of Ratnapāla mention the gift of a *lābukutikṣetra*, which according to Hoernle was "a field with clusters (hills) of gourds".<sup>92</sup> Pumpkins are still largely grown on the river banks of Assam.<sup>93</sup> Sugarcane was another food crop. The sugarcane of Assam, says Cazim, "excels in softness and sweetness, and is of three colours, red, black, and white".<sup>94</sup>

91. Yaśidhānyam rājadhānyam vṛhaddhānyāñca vallabhe  
somadhānyam śighadhānyam vāṅgam vai raktasālikam  
ketakī kalavīkāñca dhānyam nārāyaṇantathā  
mādhavañca pradipañca visnudhānyam ca vallabham  
bhogyadhānyamaśokañca nāgāksam pañcakantathā

II. 5. 239-291.

91a. *The Khāsia*, p. 39-40.

92. *Op. Cit.* p. 118.

93. *Harṣacarita* refers to gourds used to hold paints. Cowell, p. 214.

94. *Asiatic Researches*, 11, p. 173; *Akbarnāmā* says that sugarcane of Assam was so hard as to break one's teeth. Blockmann: *J.A.S.B.* Vol. 41, pt. 1, pp. 49 ff.

Besides rice growing, the cultivation of fruit trees is specially prominent in the inscriptions as it is, also, in the contemporary literary records. Of the fruit trees grown over fields and orchards the epigraphs mention *Kanṭāphala*<sup>95</sup> (jack-fruit), *Āmra* (mango),<sup>96</sup> *Jāmbu*<sup>97</sup> (*eugeniamambolana*), *Śrīphala*,<sup>98</sup> *Dumbari*<sup>99</sup> (fig tree), *Sākhotaka*,<sup>100</sup> (the walnut tree) *badari* (jujube tree), *Lakuca*<sup>101</sup> or *āmalaka*, a kind of bread fruit tree, *amla*, *betasa*<sup>102</sup> (gamboze tree) and various kinds of citron trees. Besides *pūga* (betel nut) a wild palm tree named *coraka*<sup>102a</sup> is mentioned, whose nuts are eaten as betel nuts. *Rudrākṣa*<sup>102b</sup> (bead tree) nuts are made into rosary. Huien Tsiang mentions that the people of Kāmarūpa cultivated the jack-fruit and the cocoanut.<sup>103</sup> Among the precious articles presented to Harṣa by Bhāskaravarman was included the "thick bamboo tubes containing mango sap (*sahakāratārasānāṃ*)".<sup>104</sup> "Among the fruits which this country produces", wrote Cazim, "are mangoes, plantains, jacks, oranges, citrons, limes, pineapples, and punialeh, a species of amleh, which has such an excellence of flavour that every person who tastes it, prefers it to the plum. There are also cocoanut trees, pepper-vines, arecca trees, and *sadij* (*malabothrum*) in great plenty."<sup>105</sup> "There were numerous orange trees", says another Mahomedan historian, "bearing a fine crop of very large and juicy oranges, which were sold in the Muhammedan camp at the rate of ten for a pice." As stated above, the Aphysad inscription and the Nowgong Grant of Balavarman refer to the areca palms and betel-vines which were extensively grown in the country.<sup>106</sup> Among the presents to Harṣa were included "the luscious milky betel-nut fruit, hanging from

95. *Indrapāla*, 11; *Dharmapāla* 1.

96. Balavarman; *Indrapāla* 11.

97. Balavarman.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Indrapāla* 1. *Ratnapāla* 1.

101. *K.S.*, p. 163, f.n. 3.

102. *K.S.*, p. 109, f.n. 2.

102a. *K.S.*, p. 163, f.n. 3.

102b. *K.S.*, p. 115, f.n. 2.

103. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 11, p. 195. Vansittart: *A Description of Assam* by Mahammed Cazim.

104. *Loc. Cit.*

105. *Asiatick Researches*, 11, p. 173. *Ain-i-Ākbari* (Tr. 11, pp. 117-118) mentions that in Kamrup "grows a mangoe tree that has no trunk; it trails like a climbing vine, over a tree and produces fruit". This, as Dr. King suggests, probably is Lati Am (a kind of creeper).

106. *Op. Cit.*

its sprays and green as young *hārita* doves".<sup>107</sup> Plantain trees are still very common, and Tavernier mentions extraction of salt from the leaves of this tree, and the making of a bleaching mixture from its ashes in which is boiled silk, which made it as white as snow.<sup>108</sup> An alkaline solution known as *Khāraṇī* distilled from the sheaths, corn and roots of the plantain tree is even to-day used by the villagers. This custom was noticed by the Mahomedan historian who accompanied Mirjumla in his Assam-campaign as following : "Some of the natives dry the *kalah* plant in the sun, burn it, and collect the ashes in a white sheet which they fix on four poles. They then gradually pour water on the ashes and catch whatever percolates in a vessel below the sheet. The liquid is saltpetre-like and very bitter; but they use it as salt". As the names from their language suggest, the Austric tribes probably brought the pumpkin (*alābu*), the betel-vine (*tāmbūla*), the betelnut (*gūvāka*), plantain (*kadala*), turmeric (*haridrā*), ginger (*śringavera*), and some vegetables like the brinjal (*rātiṅgana*).<sup>109</sup>

#### (ii) Forest Products

From the earliest times, the forest tracts were regarded as "no man's land", and every householder exercised the right of common over them. They served the purpose of natural pastures, burial places, cremation grounds, etc. But with the rise of centralised government, the forests and their products appear to have been regarded as state property, and were organised under a superintendent of forests. Kauṭilya lays it down that forest tracts would be granted to Brāhmaṇas for religious purposes.<sup>110</sup> From the Kamauli Grant it appears that such gifts were, also, made in Assam.<sup>111</sup> The system of forest reservation and practice, as laid down in the *Arthaśāstra* was also well established. The epigraph of Balavarman refers to the large belts of forests (*vana*).<sup>112</sup> Kālidāsa incidentally mentions that Kāmarūpa was covered with forests of valuable trees.<sup>113</sup>

The most common trees of the forests are *Vata* (*Ficus Indica*)<sup>113a</sup> and *Aśvattha*<sup>114</sup> (*Ficus Religiosa*), both these trees serve many

107. *Op. Cit.*

108. *Travels in India*, Vol. 11, Second Ed. p. 222.

109. *Indo-Aryan and Hindi*, p. 35; *Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian*.

110. Bk. 11, Chap. 11.

111. *Op. Cit.*

112. V. 9.

113. *Raghuvamśa*.

113a. Balavarman; Dharmapāla 1.

114. Ratnapāla 1; Dharmapāla 1.

religious purposes of the people. *Madhurāśvattha*<sup>115</sup> trees are used for rearing lac insects. *Sālmali*<sup>116</sup> is the silk-cotton tree. Another variety of this tree called *Kāśimbala*<sup>117</sup> (*Kuṭasālmali*) has been alluded to. *Devadāru*, *Sūvarṇadāru*, *Sarala*, and *Sāla* are largely grown. *Khadira* (*acacia catechu*) supplies the catechu used with betel-nut; its barks are used in preparing dye. The timber of *Odiamma* (*bischoffia javanica*) is used mainly for building boats. Other valuable timber trees of Assam forests are *Śalakh* (*terminalia*), *Mākai* (*shorea assamica*), *Pamā* (*cedrela toona*), *Khokan* (*durbanga soneratiooides*), *Gamāri* (*gmulina*), *Titācampā* (*micheliachampea*), *Com* (*ariocarpus chaplasha*), *Hijal*, *Pāḍali* (*Pāṭali*), the trumpet flower. Bamboo and cane are also largely grown in Assam forests. Special attention has always been given to the plantation of bamboo. Bamboo has a hundred and one requirements in the daily life of an Assamese villager. It provides him with materials for building houses, fences, bridges, and making baskets, traps for fishing and hunting. It also serves as containers and cooking utensils. Musical instruments are made of bamboo. Besides, its young sprouts serve as delicacies known in Assamese as *Kharicā* or *Gāja-teigā*. Bamboo, therefore, is held with special reverence and is forbidden to cut on inauspicious days. It should always be noted that the general belief that certain plants possess auspicious character and religious significance is greatly responsible for the avoidance of destruction of belts of trees. Besides, the forests produced many valuable articles; scents and toilet preparations are given special prominence. Assam was an important source of supply of aromatic woods, resins, etc., to the rest of India. The aromatics seem to have been fairly costly, as these, along with certain precious materials, formed a part of the presents consisting mostly of the products of the country, which the Kāmarūpa king offered to the Pāṇḍava brothers. Thus Bhīmasena, after the conquest of Assam, received sandal wood and aloewood (*aguru*) as presents.<sup>118</sup> Duryodhana, while describing the presents made to Yudhiṣṭhīra at the time of the Rājasūya sacrifice by the Kirātas living in Assam, mentions along with the precious jewels, skins, gold, sandalwood, aloewood, loads of zeodary (*bhārān kāliyakasya*) and heaps of aromatics (*gandhānām caiva rāśayāḥ*).<sup>119</sup>

115. Dharmapāla 11. See K.S., p. 182, f.n. 4.

116. Balavarman.

117. Ratnapāla 1; Dharmapāla 1; See K.S., p. 109, f.n. 1.

118. Mahābhārata, Sabhā, 30, 28.

119. Ibid, 52, 10.

In the list of royal presents to Harṣa from Bhāskaravarman was included the Gośīrṣa<sup>120</sup> sandal, "stealing the fiercest inflammation away".<sup>121</sup> That sandalwood was produced in Kāmarūpa in abundance is also borne out by references in the Arthaśāstra to such varieties of Jongaka, Grāmeruka, Jāpaka, and Taurūpa,<sup>122</sup> which were, according to the commentary definitely of Assam.<sup>123</sup> Of these, Jongaka and Taurūpa were red or dark red, soft in structure and fragrant like lotus; Grāmeruka was also red or dark red but smelt like goat's urine; and Jāpaka was red colour, and scented like the lotus flower. According to the same commentary all these were considered to be the best qualities of sandalwood. Another variety, Nāgaparrvataka, product of the mountain of the same name, which Mati Chand identifies with the Naga Hills of Assam,<sup>124</sup> was rough and had the colour of śairvāla (Vallisneria). Aguru or aloewood, which is used as incense and also for perfumes, is even to-day a valuable product of Assam forests. According to Roxbourough this much prized wood is obtained from Eastern India and the forests to the south and south-east of Sylhet extending through Manipur, Chittagong, Arakan to Mergui and Sumatra. From India it finds its way to China, and from Cochin China it was re-exported to Europe. As has been pointed out this plant since the epic period, was fabulously associated with Assam. Kālidāsa in describing the military expedition of Raghu says that after crossing the river Lauhitya, Raghu came into the country of Prāgjyotiṣa, where he saw black aguru trees (*kālāgurudrumaiḥ*) which served as posts for tethering his elephants.<sup>125</sup> The Grant of Balavarman, also, mentions Kṛṣṇāguru trees abundantly grown in the city of Prāgjyotiṣapura.<sup>126</sup> Bhāskaravarman's royal presents to Harṣa consisted of "black aloe oil" (*kṛṣṇāguru taila*).<sup>127</sup> According to the commentary, two best varieties of aguru mentioned in the Arthaśāstra, namely *joniṅaka* and *doniṅaka* were products of Kāmarūpa (*tadubhayāṇi kāmarūpajam*).<sup>128</sup> Another variety, namely Pārasamudraka, is described as having variegated colours and the

120. It is mentioned in the *Divyāvadāna* as a very costly sandalwood, pp. 30-31.

121. *Op. Cit.*

122. Shamasastry, Tr. pp. 86-87.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

124. Cosmetics and Coiffures in Ancient India. J.J.S.O.A., VIII, p. 85 f.n. 1.

125. *Raghurāmī*, IV, 1

126. v. 5.

127. Cowell, p. 214.

128. *Op. Cit.*, p. 36.

C. 12

smell of cascus or jasmine. The commentator takes it also to be a product of Assam.<sup>129</sup> From the bark of aguru were prepared the *sāñcipāts*, which were used for writing purposes. The *Harṣacarita* refers to "volumes of fine writing with leaves made from aloe bark and of the hue of the ripe pink cucumber" sent as presents from Bhāskaravarman.<sup>130</sup>

The *Arthaśāstra* mentions aromatics under the heading of *Tailaparnīka*. Ten kinds are enumerated, out of which many varieties come from Assam. These are: *Aśokagrāmika*, the product of Aśokagrāma, was of the colour of meat and smelt like a lotus flower; *Joṅgaka* was reddish yellow and smelt like a blue flower or like the urine of a cow; *Grāmeruka* was greasy and smelt like a cow's urine; *Sūrvarṇakuḍyaka*, the product of the country of Suvarṇakuḍya, was reddish yellow and smelt like Mātulunga (the fruit of the citron tree or sweet lime); *Pūrnadvīpaka*, the product of the island of Pūrnadvīpa, smelt like lotus flowers or like butter; *Bhadraśriya* and *Pāralauhityaka* were of the colour of nutmeg; *Antarvatya* was of the colour of cascus (*costus speciosus*); *Kāleyaka* which was a product of Suvarṇabhūmi, gold-producing land, was yellow and greasy; and *Auttaraparvataka* (a product of the north mountain) was reddish yellow.<sup>131</sup> Most of these varieties of *Tailaparnīkas*, according to the commentary were products of Kāmarūpa.<sup>132</sup>

*Tejpāt*, which has been indentified by Adams and other writers as the *malabothrum* of the Greeks and of the Romans, was traded and exported from India from early times. This evergreen tree with aromatic leaves is rare from the Indus to the Sutlej but is common in Assam and Burma.<sup>133</sup> *Periplus* refers to the *Sesatae*<sup>134</sup>

129. *Ibid.*

130. *Op. Cit.*

131. Shamasastry, Tr. p. 87.

132. Bhaṭṭasvāmin's Commentary, *J.B.O.R.S.*, 1925, p. 40; Śrimīla Commentary, pp. 189-90. According to Bhaṭṭasvāmī all these places mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* were located in Kāmarūpa. See also N. N. Dasgupta: Kāmarūpa and Kauṭilya, *J.A.R.S.*, VII, pp. 28-34, *I.C.V.*, pp. 339-41; K. L. Barua *J.A.R.S.*, VII, pp. 29-34; H. V. Trivedi: Geography of Kauṭilya, *I.C.*, I.

132a. *Commercial Products of India*, pp. 310 ff.

133. The people called *Sesatae* in *Periplus* are identified with the *Besadai* (or *Tiladae*) of Ptolemy. Ptolemy places them above the *Maīandros*, and from this as well as his other indications. McCrindle (*Ancient India*, p. 218) takes them to be the hill people in the vicinity of Sylhet, where as Yule remarks, the plains break into a infinity of hillocks, which are specially known as *tilā*. Gerini takes them to mean the population of Bisā and Sadiya, probably the *Mishmis* of the adjoining hills (*Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern India*, p. 830). Lassen (*Ind. Alt.* 111, 38), however derives the *Beseidæ* from the Sanskrit *ratiḍda*, i.e., "very stupid", and regards

who traded with the leaves of these trees.<sup>134</sup> From the account of Periplus it appears that this trade was carried through Assam.

Black pepper<sup>135</sup> or long pepper, and lac are two characteristic products of the Assam forests.<sup>136</sup> Watt, though somewhat doubtfully, states that black pepper or pippalī is indigenous to the forests of Assam, and Cazim speaks of the pepper vines as one of the products of the country. "The country (Assam) also produces," writes Tavernier, "an abundance of shellac, of a red colour; with it they dye their calicoes and other stuffs, and when they have extracted the red colour they use the lac to lacquer cabinets and other objects of that kind, and to make Spanish wax. A large quantity of it is exported to China and Japan, to be used in the manufacture of cabinets; it is the best lac in the whole of Asia for these purposes."<sup>137</sup> This trade is continued up to the present time; during the last five years of the nineteenth century exports of lac from Assam averaged over 16,000 maunds a year.<sup>138</sup> The chief seat of the industry is in Kamrup, the Khasi and Jaintia, and the Garo Hills. The lac insect is reared on several species of the Ficus family; and the bulk of the produce is exported in the form of stick lac; that is, the small twigs surrounded by deposits of translucent orange-yellow gum in which the insect is embedded. Occasionally the gummy matter is strained off and sold as red dye. The gum is then melted, cleaned, and sold as shellac or butter lac.

them as a tribe of Sikkim. Schoff and Taylor take them to be the people of the bordering tribes of Assam (Schoff, pp. 278-279; Taylor: Remarks on the sequel to the Periplus of Erythrean Sea, and on the country of the Seres, as described by Ammianus Marcellinus, *J.A.S.B.*, XVI, 1847, pp. 1 ff.). Periplus gives us the following interesting story about a festival of the Sesatae: Every year this tribe held a yearly festival at certain places bordering on their own country and that of Thina, and, accompanied by their wives and children they travelled to this spot (associated with some deity of local tradition), carrying the leaves of the cinnamoumam tamala of their native mountains to be used as mats to sleep on. Then after their festival was over and they had departed, certain men (merchants on their travels) who had noticed this annual ritual went to the place and collected the leaves. Extracting the fibres (i.e., stems or stalks) from the reeds, i.e. leaves, they rolled the leaves into balls and strung them on the stems (Whiteley, *Ibid.*, p. 578). Taylor here finds a description of the manner of marketing malabothrum by the hill people of Assam.

134. Schoff, pp. 48-49.

135. Hobson-Jobson, New Edition, p. 697.

136. Basu: Note on the Cultivation of Black Pepper in Assam, Shillong, 1898.

137. Tavernier, Op. Cit., p. 221.

138. Note on the Lac Industry of Assam, Shillong, 1900, for use of Lac as dyes see Duncun's Monograph on Dyes and in Assam.

Kauṭilya in his list of forest products includes the skins of wild beasts, bones, teeth, horse's tails, etc., as well as wild animals, birds, and many other articles.<sup>139</sup> The account in the *Harṣacarita* provides us with a list of such products found in Assam. It mentions "heaps of black and white chowries, curious pairs of *kīṣṇaras*, apes (*vanamānuṣa*), *jīvañjiraka* birds, and mermen, with necks bound in golden fetters; musk deer scenting the space all round them with their perfumes; tame female *cāmara* deer; parrots, *sārikas*, and other birds enclosed in gold-painted bamboo cages, and partridges in cages of coral."<sup>140</sup> Kālidāsa refers to elephants caught in the forests of Assam.<sup>141</sup> Rhinoceros, tigers, buffaloes, wild boars are other common wild animals.<sup>142</sup> The inscriptions, the *Yoginī Tantra*<sup>143</sup> as well as the early Assamese literature furnish us with names of various kinds of birds found in Assam. Birds are generally classified into two groups: namely *Jalacara* (aquatic) and *thalacara* (land birds). Peacocks and *rājahamsas* have been frequently mentioned in the epigraphs. Kokila (Indian cuckoo) and *ketekī* (Indian nightingale) are well known for their sweet notes. To this class belong *Tunjunī* and *Sakhiyatī*. *Cāṭaka* a kind of cuckoo supposed to drink dripping water of the clouds. *Cakora* is described as a bird who drinks moonlight as for its substance. *Cakravāka*, known in modern Assamese as *Cākai* and *Cakorā* are believed to live in pairs during the day time and remain separate at night on the two banks of a river. *Konḍa*, *Krauñca* and *Kanka* are kinds of the heron, large water-fowls with long legs and neck. *Baka*, a crane, *Bherā*, a pelican, *Teliyā sāreṅg*, a species of stork, *Kairā* or *Hayakali*, a partridge, *Darika*, a variety of pheasant, *Māch-rokā*, a king-fisher, and *Kāma*, a kind of blue bird, usually live by marshes. *Tokorā*, *Sālikā*, *Maynā* and *Ghara cirikā* are different kinds of sparrows. *Ghara cirikā* is so called for it builds nests on the roofs of houses. *Pārāvata* and *Kapota* are pigeons and doves

139. Shamasastry, Ch XVII, p. 119.

140. Cowell, *Ibid.*

141. *Bheje bhinna-kaṣairndgairanyāñuparurodhā.*

— R. V., IV, 83.

142. *Hasti ghorā gaṇḍārata lakhi mahiṣata....*

*Siṃha bāgha myga nāga barāha bhāluka*

*Biḍālti kaṣalā bherā biḍālti jambuka.*

— *Babrubhā Parva*, V, 28.

143. *Hāritañca mayūram ca nāyakam vārtakam tathā*

*kapilascaira cāṣaica kākā-kukkuṭakau śīrah*

*vānya-kukkuṭakacaiś tārārūśca kapotakah*

*bilevakah kulikacaiś raktapuechaśca ṣiṣibhah*

*kṛṣṇamatryāśāṇī caiś patrindmea viśiṣyate*

— *Yoginī Tantra*, II, 9, 258-260.

respectively. Śuka is the common parrot known in Assamese as *Bhāṭau*; it has various kinds, namely, *galamaṇīka*, *gala-porā*, *tiyā*, *candana*, *bholā* and *madana*. *Heṭulukā* is wood-pecker; *Bhadarkali* or *Khañjana* (*Bālimāhī*) is wagtail noted for its elegant and sportive movements. *Dhaneśa* (*Pākaiḍhorā*) is hornbill with long yellow beak seen only in hills. Its flesh and fat are used for medicinal purposes. Among the common birds of prey are *Gṛdhra* or *Śakuni* (Assamese *Śagun*), *Syen* (falcon), *Cilā* (kite), *Kāka* (Crow), and *Pecaka* (owl).<sup>144</sup> *Garuḍa* is a fabulous bird and is mentioned as the vehicle of Viṣṇu.

## 5. CRAFTS AND INDUSTRIES

### (i) Silk

There were craftsmen of many kinds in Kāmarūpa. We have in our records references to weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. From remote antiquity, Assam enjoyed a reputation as producing silk of a high degree of perfection.<sup>145</sup> The antiquity of the silk industry in India is uncertain, but the weight of evidence seems to be in favour of its importation from China. Schoff considers that it was imported by way of the Brahmaputra valley, and this seems very likely.<sup>146</sup> Pliny shows some knowledge of the silk trade that was carried on through Assam.<sup>147</sup> The Mahomedan historians noticed that the silks of Assam were excellent and resembled those of China. Tavernier writes of Assam silk "produced on trees" and adds that "the stuffs made of them were very brilliant."<sup>148</sup> The royal presents

144. *Hāṇīsa pāra kāka baka āru phēcā pakṣī  
kairā mairā kukurā caṭaka dehe lechī  
śāranya kupati bherā kuruvā devamard  
pāṇikāka raghugurā māchrokā kanovā  
bhadrakāli kore konḍa dāuka titirī  
gupechī bālīki tūni kanovāmūchurī  
deva carāi dhārā cardi śaguna ūkorā  
bajradamāda pūndarīka gobara-khocharā  
gaṅgācīlā phākuchīlā bhārei kapilā  
koroñca kuruvā peñcā pheculukā chīlā*

— *Babrubāha Parva*, V. 30-32.

145. For present-day Assam silk see notes on *Some Industries of Assam*, Shillong, 1896, pp. 1-28, pp. 77-111; Geoghegan: *Some Account of Silk in India*, 1872, pp. 16, 17; Hamilton: *An Account of Assam*, pp. 61-62, Watt, pp. 1009 ff. Thos. Hugon: *Remarks on the silk worms and silks of Assam*, J.A.S.B., VI, (1837) pp. 21-38.

146. *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, p. 264.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

148. *Op. Cit.*, 11, p. 220.

which Hamsavega carried to Harṣa included "silken cloths (*Kṣaumāṇi*) pure as the moon's light," "soft loin cloths (*Jātipatti-kāḥ*) smooth as birch bark", "sacks of woven silk", "wrappers of white bark-silk" and various kinds of smooth-figured textiles.<sup>149</sup> The *Arthaśāstra*, while mentioning the varieties of textile commodities known as *dukula*, says, "that which is the product of the country Suvarṇakuḍya is as red as the sun (*bälärkaprabham*), as soft as the surface of a gem, being woven while the threads are very wet (*mani-snigdhadaka-vānam*), of uniform (*caturasra*) or mixed texture (*vijāmiśravāna*).<sup>150</sup> Kauṭilya also refers to the varieties of fibrous garments known as *patronā*, and remarks that which is produced in the country of Suvarṇakuḍya was the best: *tisāṁ sauvarṇa-kuḍyakā śreṣṭhā*.<sup>151</sup>

The three varieties of Indian silk generally known as *Pāṭ*, *Endī*, and *Mugā* are specially associated with Assam. The names *Pāṭ* (*Paṭṭaja*), and *Endī* (*Eranda*) no doubt originated from Sanskrit, but *Mugā* seems to be a characteristically Assamese name. It is said to be derived from the amber colour of the silk of the wild-cocoon (*palu*). The rearing of the silk-worms, even to-day, is the main occupation of many eastes of Assam.<sup>152</sup> Assam was probably known even in the time of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a country of "cocoon rearers". In the *Kiskindhyākāṇḍa*, for instance, while mentioning the countries one passes through going to the east, the poet refers to Magadha, Anga, Pundra, and the "country of the cocoon-rearers", (*koṣa-kārānām bhūmiḥ*) which must be Assam.

A considerable amount of cotton is even now produced in Assam, and the art of making cotton cloths has reached high perfection.<sup>153</sup> Skill in the art of weaving and spinning has always been held to be one of the highest attainments of an Assamese woman. Almost all the terms expressing excellence of attainments in a woman can be traced to this idea of skill in spinning and weaving. When a proposal of marriage is made the first question asked about the bride is whether she knows *bowā-kaṭā*, i.e., whether she is skilled in spinning and weaving. The Ahom kings established a department of weaving and maintained skilled weavers to supply the royal wardrobe with cloths. These weavers received grants of rent-free lands and other favours in return for their services.

149. Loc. Cit.

150. Shamasastri, Tr. p. 90.

151. *Arthaśāstra*, p. 195.

152. Helfer: On the Indigenous Silk-worms of India, J.A.S.B., VI, p. 43; Roy: Textile Industry in Ancient India, J.B.O.R.S., Vol. III, Pt. II, pp. 180-245.

153. Samman: Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Assam, 1897.

## (ii) Gold-washing and Jewellery

Another important ancient industry was gold-washing and manufacture of jewellery. Gold was found in abundance in many of the rivers of Assam,<sup>154</sup> and there is an indication in the Periplus, as Schoff supposes, of Assam gold being brought to market-places near the Ganges delta.<sup>155</sup> The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla states that the river Lauhitya carried down gold-dust from legendary gold-bearing boulders of the sacred Kailāsa mountain. According to the Silimpur inscription,<sup>156</sup> King Jayapāla offered a gift of gold equal to his own weight (*tulya puruṣadāna*) to a learned Brāhmaṇa, over and above nine hundred gold coins.<sup>157</sup> Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri says that numerous idols both of gold and silver, a huge image of beaten gold weighing two or three thousand mans (maunds) stood in a temple in Kāmarūpa.<sup>158</sup> Even in later times, during the Ahom rule gold-washing was done on an elaborate scale by a class of people known as *Sonorāls* and the state derived considerable income from the yearly tax levied on gold-washing. *Fathiya-i-Ibriyah* says that about ten thousands people were employed in the washings, and each man made on an average a *tolā* of gold per annum and handed it to the king.<sup>159</sup>

An idea of the variety and excellence of the ancient jeweller's skill may be derived from a persual of the list of presents to Harṣa from Bhāskarvarman as described by the court poet Bāṇa. Bāṇa mentions the exquisite ornamented *Abhoga* umbrella with the jewelled ribs : ornaments which crimsoned the heavenly spaces with the light of the finest gems : shining crest jewels : pearl necklaces which seemed the source of the milk-ocean's whiteness : quantities of pearls, shell, sapphire, and other drinking vessels by skilful artists (*kuśala-silpilokollikhitānām*), cages of coral and rings of ivory, encrusted with rows of huge pearls from the brows of elephants.<sup>159a</sup> Kālidāsa refers to the mineral resources of Kāma-

154. The best and purest gold was found in Subansiri, Dihau and Jaglo rivers. Vide Native Account of Washing for gold in Assam, J.A.S.B., VIII, pp. 621-25; Hanny: Note on Gold-Fields of Assam, J.A.S.B., XVII, pp. 515-521 and further information, J.A.S.B., VII, pp. 625, 28; Robinson: Descriptive Account of Assam; p. 35; Butler: A Sketch of Assam, pp. 130-33; Wade: An Account of Assam.

155. Op. Cit., pp. 258-59.

156. V. 1.

157. Supra, Chap. 11.

158. Raverty, p. 569. *Riyaz-us-salatin*, Tr. p. 67.

159. J.A.S.B., XXX, Pt. 1, p. 49 ff.

159a. Op. Cit., pp. 214-15.

rūpa which yielded gems in large quantity.<sup>160</sup> The inscription of Ratnapāla mentions the existence of a copper-mine within his kingdom which the king worked with profit.

The list further suggests a number of different types of craftsmen such as basket-makers, wood-workers and painters. The presents included "baskets of variously coloured reeds," "gold painted bamboo cages," "cane stools"<sup>161</sup> with the bark yellow as the ear of millet." "carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes and gourds attached."<sup>162</sup> Even at a much later period, speaking of the wood-work of the province, *Fathiya-i-Ibriyah* states that boxes, trays, stools and chairs are cleverly and neatly made of one piece of wood.<sup>163</sup> The description of the artistically carved, painted and decorated boats in Vanamāla's Copper-plate itself bears ample testimony to the high proficiency of the early wood-carvers in their craft.<sup>164</sup> Mat-making is even to-day a major cottage industry of the province. The early literature refers to well-decorated and artistically made *Sital Pāṭis* used by the rich and fashionable people. They are smooth and cool and are sometimes boiled in a solution to give them colourful appearances.

### (iii) Other Crafts

Of the other important crafts mention may be made of engraving, with special reference to royal charters either on stone or copper-plates, brick-making<sup>165</sup> and stone-carving. As revealed in the *burañjis*, the chronicles of the Ahom kings, the art of brick-making was continued with all perfection down to their time. The bricks were burnt almost to the consistency of tiles. It is recorded in the *burañjis* that in making bricks, the white of eggs was mixed to render them harder and smooth.<sup>166</sup> The references in the inscriptions to several storeyed palaces, and the discovery of a large number of stone images, and remnants of old stone structures clearly prove the attainment of the architects and sculptors of the period. An outstanding example of the engineering skill of the people of

160. *Raghuvamśa*, IV, 84.

161. Assam even today produces varieties of the best cane. Vide, Jacob : *The Forest Resources of Assam*, 1940, pp. 55 ff., Taylor maintains that the unexplored country to the west of Serica, mentioned by Ptolemy, that grew large canes and used them for bridges, was Assam. *J.A.S.B.*, XVI, (1847), pp. 52-53.

162. *Op. Cit.*

163. *Op. Cit.*

164. *Op. Cit.*

165. *Suäluchi Grant of Ratnapāla*.

166. *Gazetteer of Assam*.

Assam in ancient times was the construction of stone bridges. There was an ancient stone bridge over a channel of the Barnâdi over which Muhammad-i-Bukhtiyar and his Turkish cavalry passed in the year 1206 A.D. Considering the design and style of architecture of the bridge, Hannay, who saw a part of the structure in 1851, remarked that the bridge evidently belonged to a remote period in the annals of Kāmarūpa and its original structure at least must be coeval with the erection of the ancient Hindu temples.<sup>167</sup> The province made great progress in the extraction of iron from ores. Even today smelting of iron is carried on in many places of the Khasi and Naga Hills.<sup>168</sup> Colonel Lister, writing in 1853, estimated that 20,000 maunds of iron were reported from the hills in the shape of hoes to Assam Valley and in lumps of pig iron to the Surma Valley, where it was used by boat-builders for clamps. Dr. Oldham, writing in 1863, says, "the quality of this Khasi iron is excellent for all such purposes as Sweedish iron now used for."

The Kamauli and Nidhanpur Grants refer respectively to *Kumbhakāra*<sup>169</sup> (potter) and *kumbhakāragarta*<sup>170</sup> (the potter's pit) and it is obvious that pottery was also an important village craft as it still is. The discovery of a large number of terra cotta figures,<sup>171</sup> leads us to believe that the village potter, besides his normal duty of vase-making was engaged in toy-making also. The *Harsacarita* refers to leather-workers and distillers of wine. It mentions *Kārdaranya* and *Samuruka* leather and speaks of "cups of *ulluka*, diffusing a fragrance of sweetest wine".<sup>172</sup>

## 6. TRADE ROUTES

### (i) Route to Magadha

A careful examination of the facts enumerated above leaves no room for doubt that from very early times Assam was noted for her textiles and various valuable forest and mineral products. Many of these articles were not only exported to neighbouring provinces but found their way into Tibet, Burma, and China. The trade with the neighbouring provinces was mainly carried by river transport. The excellence of Assam's water-communications

167. Major S. T. Hannay: Brief Notice of the Sil Sako or Stone Bridge in Zillah Kamrup, *J.A.S.B.*, XX, pp. 291-294.

168. *J.A.S.B.*, Vol. XI, Pt. 11, p. 853.

169. *Op. Cit.*

170. *Op. Cit.*

171. *R.A.S.I.*

172. *Loc. Cit.*

is evident, and it certainly facilitated trade in every direction.<sup>173</sup> The main route from Kāmarūpa to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was by the rivers Brahmaputra and Ganges. In the middle of the seventh century, when Bhāskaravarman invited Hiuen Tsiang to Assam, the pilgrim started from Magadha, passed by Campā (modern Bhagalpur), Kājaṅgala (Rajmahal) and Pundravardhana (Rangpur) and so going eastward reached Kāmarūpa.<sup>174</sup> This must have been the usual route from Magadha. When Bhāskaravarman was alarmed at having angered Harṣa by refusing to part with the great Chinese teacher, he hurriedly availed himself of this route to meet Harṣa on the bank of the Ganges near Kie-shu-ho-ki-lo (Kajurgira-Kānkjal, Rajmahal).<sup>175</sup> The communication between Kāmarūpa and Nālandā was obviously speedy, for we have noticed previously, how a courier dispatched by Bhāskaravarman from Kāmarūpa presented a letter at Nālandā after only two days.<sup>176</sup> Harṣa, also, sent a messenger from Koṇgyadha (Ganjam) to Kāmarūpa.<sup>177</sup> From these incidents it may be seen that there were regular routes to Kāmarūpa from Nālandā and Orissa; they further suggest the organisation of swift postal communications through these provinces, probably by means of the usual Indian system of post-services.

#### (ii) Routes to China and Burma

Beal, in his introduction to the life of Hiuen Tsiang maintains that Bhāskaravarman and the former kings of Kāmarūpa had the sea-route to China under their special protection.<sup>178</sup> That there were well-known routes to China from Kāmarūpa can be proved from the account of the great Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang. For example, when he told Bhāskaravarman that he would like to return to China, the king replied, "But I know not, if you prefer to go, by what route you propose to return; if you select the southern sea-route, then I will send some officials to accompany you".<sup>179</sup> It is therefore evident that there existed sea routes by which seafarers returned to China from the neighbourhood of Kāmarūpa in the seventh century A.D., and that shipping could

173. Hamilton: *Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindosthan and the Adjacent Countries*, London, 1820, Vol. II, p. 741.

174. *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, II, p. 195.

175. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, p. 86.

176. *Ibid.*, 186.

177. *Ibid.*

178. *Ibid.*, Intro, XXVI.

179. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

be controlled. Besides this water-way there was also a land route to China, through the northern mountains of Assam. When Hiuen Tsiang came to Kāmarūpa he was told of the existence of a route leading to south-west China. "To the east of Kāmarūpa," he says, "the country is a series of hills and hillocks without any principal city, and one can reach the south-west barbarians (of China); hence the inhabitants were akin to the man and the Lao."<sup>180</sup> The pilgrim further learnt from the people of Kāmarūpa that the south-west borders of Sse-chouan were distant about two months' journey, "but the mountains were hard to pass; there were pestilential vapours and poisonous snakes and herbs."<sup>181</sup> That this route was in use is proved by the following account: When Bhāskaravarman learnt from the pilgrim that the latter's country was Mahācina, he enquired about a song that came from China but was very popular in Assam at that time. The song referred to was the song of the victory of the second son of the T'ang Emperor Kao-tsou, Prince of Ts'in, over the rebel general Liu Wou-Cheou in 619 A.D.<sup>181</sup> This points to the intimate intercourse that existed between China and Assam at the time, and it is even more surprising when we take into consideration the fact that a Chinese musical piece composed after 619 A.D. had penetrated the region of Kāmarūpa and become popular by 638 A.D. when Hiuen Tsiang visited the country. It may be assumed the northern mountain road was plentifully supplied with trade and well-trodden.

But the existence of this route is attested at an even earlier date. Pelliot has shown that from early times, at least from the second century B.C., there was a regular trade-route by land between Eastern India and China through Upper Burma and Yunnan.<sup>182</sup> This is testified by the report which Chang-Kien the famous Chinese ambassador to the Yue-chi country, submitted in 126 B.C. When he was in Bactria he was surprised to find silk and bamboo which came from the Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Szechuan. On enquiry he was told of the rich and powerful country of India across which the caravans carried these products from southern China to Afghanistan. It is too often assumed that the Gobi routes were China's only means of contact with India and the west, but the evidence summarised here shows that neither the sea-routes nor the Assam-Burma routes can be neglected.

180. *World*, pp. 198-199.

181. *Ibid.*

182. *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient*, 1904, pp. 142 ff.

In point of fact an itinerary preserved in Kia-tan of the end of the 8th century A.D. described in detail the latter route. Starting from Tonkin, the southernmost of the commercial centres of China, the route passed by Yunnansen, Yunnan-fou and Ta-li-fou. Going westwards it crossed the Salouen at Young Chang (Young Chang fou) on the west of the river. Still going westward it reached the town of Chou-ko-leang (to the east of Momein), between the Shiveli and the Salouen. The route bifurcated there, the principal one descending by the valley of the Shiveli to join the Irrawaddy on the south-west, and the other continuing directly to the west. Starting from Chou-ko-leang, the principal route crossed the frontier of P'iao (Burma) near Lo, the frontier town of Nan-Chao, and, passing through the country of mountain tribes, it reached Si-li midway between Ta-gaung and Mandalay. The route then passed by Tou-min (Pagan) and reached the capital of Burma, Śrikṣetra (Prome). Leaving Prome it crossed a range of black mountains to the west (the modern Arakan range) and so reached Kāmarūpa. The second route, starting from Chou-ko-leang, went right westwards to Teng Ch'ong (Momein); then crossing the Mi mountains, it reached Li-Shouei, on the Irrawaddy (Bhamo or near about to the north). Then crossing the river Longtsuan (Magaung) it passed the town of Nagansi, and going westwards, crossed the river Min-no (Chindwin) and the mountains between it and reached Kāmarūpa.<sup>183</sup>

Tucci refers to Buddhagupta, a sixteenth-century Indian Buddhist monk who in his biography points to the existence of a well-known land-route connecting Kāmarūpa with Burma. The monk himself followed this route in his itinerary from Gauhati to Pagan.<sup>184</sup>

### (iii) Trade-Routes in Later times

McCosh refers to no less than five roads leading from Sadiya, the frontier station of the Brahmaputra Valley into Tibet or China proper.<sup>185</sup> They are: the pass of the Dihong, the Mishmi route,

183. Bagchi: *India and China*, p. 18 ff.

184. G. Tucci: *The Sea and Land Travels of a Buddhist Sādhu in the sixteenth century*, I.H.Q., VII, pp. 683-701.

185. McCoch: On the Various Lines of Overland Communication between India and China, *Proc. Royal Geographical Society*, London, Vol. V, 1860-61, pp. 47-54; Account on the Mountain Tribes on the Extreme N. E. Frontier of Bengal, *J.A.S.B.*, V, pp. 203-4.

the Phungan pass to Manchée and China, the route by Manipur<sup>186</sup> to the Irrawaddy, and the Pātkāi Pass to Bhamo on the Irrawaddy. The most important and easy route was on the north-eastern side over the Pātkāi to the upper districts of Burma and thence to China. Through this route Shan invaders came to the Brahmaputra Valley. In 1816 during the Burmese invasion, some 6000 Burmese troops and 8000 auxiliaries crossed Patkai into Assam. In former days the Burmese government took care that there should be a village, or rather a military settlement every twelve or fifteen miles along the route and it was the business of the people to cut the jungles and to remove all other obstructions from the path.<sup>187</sup>

Numerous passes and ways, known as Duars, still exist between Assam and Tibet through Bhutan. The route to Tibet runs across the Himalayan mountains parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra. The *Tabaqūt-i-Nāsiri* says that between Kāmarūpa and Tibet there are thirty-five mountain passes through which horses are brought to Lakhnauti.<sup>188</sup> Lieutenant Rutherford stated the Khampha Bhoateas or Lhassa merchants, just before the Burmese invasion, had unreserved commercial intercourse with Assam. The commercial transaction between the two countries was carried on in the following manner. At a place called Chouna, two months' journey from Lhassa, on the confines of the two states, there was a mart established, and on the Assam side there was a similar mart at Gegunshur, distant four miles from Chouna. An annual caravan would repair from Lhassa to China, conducted by about twenty persons, conveying silver bullion to the amount of one lac of rupees, and a considerable quantity of rock salt, for sale to the Assam merchants; the latter brought rice, which was imported into Tibet from Assam in large quantities, Assam silk, iron, lac, otter skins, buffalo horns, pearls, etc. That the route from

186. Through the Manipur route the bulk of the Indian refugees from Burma and the retreating British Army found their way into Assam in 1941-42. Two other routes followed by the Indian refugees, were the Hukawng Valley and the Chaukan Pass. The Hukawng Valley route took them across the mountains from Myitkyina in upper Burma to the railhead in Assam at Tipand near Margherita. Vide Robert Reid: Assam, J.R.S.A.-XCII, pp. 241-47.

187. Peal: Note on the Old Burma Route over Patkai via Nongyang, in *J.A.S.B.*, XXXXVIII, Pt. II, pp. 69-82; Jenkins: Notes on the Burmese Route from Assam to the Hoakoong Valley, *Pro.A.S.B.* 1869; Pemberton: Eastern Frontier, etc., pp. 54 ff. Jenkins: Notes on the Burmese Route from Assam to the Hoakoong Valley, *Pro.A.S.B.*, 1869, pp. 67-74.

188. Sir Arthur Phayre in his *History of Burma*, (p. 15) observes that early communication between Gangetic India and Tagaung was in existence through Manipur (Assam).

Lhassa was convenient and safe can be inferred from the small number of persons who composed the caravan, and which even carried silver bullion to the amount of a lac of rupees.<sup>189</sup>

Through Bhutan along the mountains was also a trade route to Kabul. Tavernier mentions that in his time merchants travelled through Bhutan to Kabul to avoid paying the duty that was levied on merchandise passing into India via Gorakhpur. He describes the journey as extending over deserts and mountains covered with snow, tedious and troublesome as far as Kabul, where the caravans part, some for great Tartary, others for Balk. At the latter place merchants of Bhutan bartered their goods. The account indicates that the merchandise brought from Assam to Bactria was purchased there by merchants who were proceeding or who were on their way to India, and who afterwards sailed down the Indus to Gujarat, where they took ship for the Red Sea.<sup>190</sup>

#### 7. MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE

Before concluding the section a few observations are to be made regarding the currency of the period. Unfortunately no coins belonging to the period have yet been discovered. We have however, a reference to the use of gold coins. According to the Silimpur inscription (11th century A.D.) a Brāhmaṇa of Bengal (Varendri) was offered by king Jayapāla of Kāmarūpa, *hemnām śatāni nava*, which Basak takes to mean "nine hundred gold coins".<sup>191</sup> Bhaṭṭa-svāmin, while explaining the term Gauḍikam or Gaulikam mentioned in the Arthaśāstra in the context of silver coin, says that Gauḍikam was the silver from Kāmarūpa.<sup>192</sup> As noted above, the inscription of Ratnapāla mentions the existence of a copper mine; evidently copper was used for coinage also. Cowrie shells also served as the medium of exchange. The Tezpur Rock inscription refers to a penalty of a hundred cowries for the infringement of a certain state regulation.<sup>193</sup>

189. Op. Cit., Hamilton, Vol. 11, pp. 743 ff. Pemberton's Report on Bhootan, p. 144.

190. Taylor, Op. Cit., J.A.S.B., XVI, p. 31-32. J. L. Whiteley: *The Periplos of the Erythrean Sea* [Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D., University of London, (1940)], pp. 572 ff.

191. E.I., XIII, pp. 292, 295.

192. J.B.O.R.S., XI, Pt. II, p. 62.

193. Loc. Cit.

## CHAPTER V

### I. SOCIETY

#### 1. VARNA-SRAMADHARMA

The most striking feature of ancient Indian society was the *varṇāśrama* system, the classes (*varṇa*) and the four stages (*āśrama*) into which the law-books divide the life of men. The Kāmarūpa kings seem to take special care to preserve the traditional divisions of society, namely, Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras. In the inscriptions they are frequently referred to as the protector of the *varṇāśramadharma*, upholder of the duties of all classes. In the Nidhanpur Grant, Bhāskaravarman is described as "being created for the purpose of re-establishing the institutions of classes and orders, which had for a long time past become confused" (*avakīrṇīvarṇāśramadharma pravibhāgāya nirmito*).<sup>1</sup> It is said of king Indrapāla that during his reign "the earth was happy and greatly flourishing, and became the cow that yields all desires .... as in the time of Prthu, because the laws of the four *Āśramas* and of the four *Varnas* were observed in their proper divisions".<sup>2</sup>

It should however be noted that *varṇa* (colour) had by this time lost its original significance and become synonymous with *jāti*, the system which laid emphasis on birth and heredity. Consequently the original division of the people into four *varṇas* had been submerged and numerous new castes<sup>3</sup> and subcastes had been evolved, mainly by the development of different arts, crafts and professions. As Risley suggests, tribal, racial and religious factors were also at work in gradually adding to their number.<sup>4</sup> But unfortunately, except in a few cases, the epigraphs tell us very little about social organisation.

As portrayed in the inscriptions, however, the four stages (*āśrama*) into which man's span of life itself was classified provided the pattern of life of the period. As stated in Manu, the first state of man's life is *brahmacharya*, in which he studies in his teacher's

1. Line 35.

2. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v. 18.

3. It is worth remembering that the word "caste" is Portuguese, not Indian.

4. Risley: *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, I, p. xv ff.

house. After he has finished his studies, in the second part of his life he marries and becomes a householder (*gr̥hastha*) and discharges his debt to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by performing sacrifices. When he sees that his head is turning grey and that there are wrinkles on his body, he resorts to the forests and becomes a *Vānaprasthin*. After spending the third part of his life in the forest, he spends the rest of his life as a *yati* or *sannyāsin*.<sup>5</sup> But this was only an ideal; and it is doubtful if ever it was observed in this province.

Even among classical writers, there were different views with reference to the four *āśramas*. Gautama<sup>6</sup> and Baudhāyana<sup>7</sup> hold that there is really one *āśrama*, viz., that of the householder (*brahamacarya* being only preparatory to it); the other *āśramas* are inferior to that of the householder. On the whole, the tendency of most of the *Dharmaśāstras* seems to glorify the status of the householder and to push into the background the two *āśramas* of *Vānaprastha* and *Yati*, so much so that certain works say that these are forbidden in the Kali age.<sup>8</sup> We have, however, definite evidence that it was normal for the Brāhmaṇas of early Kāmarūpa to enter upon the life of a householder after going through their noviciate.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless there is constant evidence of the abdication of kings, who embraced a life of renunciation.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. BRAHMĀNA

The influence of Kāmarūpa over north-eastern India, after the fall of the imperial power of the Guptas in the latter part of the 5th century A.D. caused the migration of a large number of Brāhmaṇas to Kāmarūpa. It is evident that the patronage which Kāmarūpa kings extended to learned men and religious teachers attracted a large number of learned men to the country. The Nidhanpur Plates alone reveal that the kings adopted a systematic policy of settling Brāhmaṇas in the kingdom by gifts of land in the shape of an *agrahāra* to further their religious pursuits. The Khonāmukhi Plates recorded a gift of land by king Dharmapāla to a learned Brāhmaṇa, who hailed from Madhyadeśa, "the well-known place of residence of Brāhmaṇas who constantly performed

5. Manu, IV, 1, V, 169; VI, 1-2, 33.

6. III, 1, 35.

7. II, 6, 29.

8. *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, Pt. 1, p. 424.

9. *Infra.*, Chap. V, Sec. 11.

10. *Supra.*, Chap. II.

sacrifices and were reluctant to accumulate riches."<sup>11</sup> According to the Silimpur Grant, king Jayapāla persistently pressed the Brāhmaṇa of Puṇḍra to accept nine hundred gold coins in cash and a grant of land yielding an income of 1,000 coins.<sup>12</sup> According to the Kamauli Grant, "gifts and donations to Brāhmaṇas were regarded as good fruits and fresh sprouts."<sup>13</sup> In fact, on account of this constant royal patronage Kāmarūpa seems to have become a resort of the Brāhmaṇas of the neighbouring provinces. Moreover, as the tide of Buddhism began to subside in Northern India, the Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa began to migrate westward. Bhattacharya rightly observes that most of the Brāhmaṇa families of modern Bengal are the descendants of Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa.<sup>14</sup>

The social organisation of the Brāhmaṇas was distinguished by *gotras* and *veda-sākhās*. Both were of importance fundamentally in matters relating to inheritance, marriage, worship, sacrifice, the performances of daily *sandhyā* prayers and so forth. The general idea of *gotra* is that it denotes all persons who trace descent in an unbroken male line from a common ancestor; that is to say, when a person says, "I am of the Jamadagni *gotra*," he means that he traces his descent from the ancient sage Jamadagni by unbroken male descent. As stated by Baudhāyana, in ancient times these progenitors or founders of *gotras* were supposed to be eight. Subsequently the number increased to several hundreds. But the mass of materials on the subject is so vast and conflicting that it is hardly possible to enumerate *gotras* ancient and modern. This power of amplifying the list of *gotras* was already far advanced in our period. In the Nidhanpur Grant alone fifty-six *gotras* are set out.<sup>15</sup> The Grant of Vanamāla refers to a Brāhmaṇa of the Sāṇḍilya *gotra* of the Yajurveda.<sup>16</sup> The grant of Balavarman mentions a section belonging to the *kāṇvaśākhā* of Kapila *gotra*.<sup>17</sup> The Bargāon Grant indicates the existence of a *Kāṇvaśākhā* of the Parāśara *gotra*,<sup>18</sup> and his Śuälkuchi Grant also mentions the Bharadvāja *gotra*.<sup>19</sup> Both the Indrapāla Grants refer to Brāhmaṇas

11. J.A.R.S. Vol. III, 1941, pp. 113 ff. and Vol. XI, 1944, pp. 1-3. Madhya-desa is the country bounded by the river Sarasvatī in Kurukṣetra, Allahabad, the Himalaya, and the Vindhya (*Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Mediæval India*, p. 116).

12. E.I., XIII, p. 292.

13. Op. Cit., v. 20.

14. E.I., XIV, p. 216.

15. See Appendix.

16. v. 30.

17. v. 26.

18. v. 16.

19. v. 16.

C. 14

of the Kāśyapa gotra.<sup>20</sup> The copper-plates of Dharmapāla refer to Brāhmaṇas of the Kauthumaśākhā<sup>21</sup> as well as to the Śuddha Maudgalya<sup>22</sup> and Kārṣṇāyasa gotras.<sup>23</sup> It also mentions the Aṅgirasa pravara.<sup>24</sup>

The conception of Pravara is closely interwoven with that of the gotra. Pravara literally means "choosing" or "invoking" (*prārthanā*). As Agni was invoked to carry the sacrificer's offering to the gods in the name of the illustrious ṛsis (his remote ancestors) who in former times had successfully invoked Agni, the word *pravara* came to denote one or more illustrious ṛsis, who were claimed as ancestors by the sacrificer. The two systems are, in a sense, contradictory, but the *gotra* has come to be associated with one, two, three or five sages (but never four, or more than five) that constitute the *pravara* of that *gotra*.<sup>25</sup>

The title given to most of the Brāhmaṇas of the epigraphs are: Dera, Śarmāṇ and Svāmin. Their names generally end in *Bhaṭṭa*, *Dāma*, *Deva*, *Dhara*, *Dāsa*, *Datta*, *Ghoṣa*, *Kara*, *Kuṇḍa*, *Mitra*, *Nāga*, *Nandi*, *Pālita*, *Sena*, *Soma*, and so forth. It is, however, not possible to say whether these name-endings were real hereditary family names. Many of them are still used as surnames by the Kāyasthas of Assam and Bengal; but it is interesting to note that they are not in use among Brāhmaṇas now. These titles are similar to those of the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas who are supposed to have originally migrated from Nagarkot in the Punjab to various places of India. This has led some scholars to think that the Brāhmaṇas to whom Bhūtivarman granted land in about 500 A.D. were of the same stock as the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas who are said to have migrated to Gujerāṭa about the same time with the rise of the Vallabhi kings.<sup>26</sup> In this connection it should also be noted that the Brāhmaṇas of Assam to-day follow the Mithilā school in matters of social law, such as inheritance, gift, will and marriage. They even trace their descent from the Brāhmaṇas of Kānya-kubja (Kanauj); and the tradition says that they emigrated to Assam during the time of Naraka.<sup>26a</sup>

The Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa seem to have lived, on the whole, in conformity with the canonical texts. At any rate, in the inscrip-

20. Gauhāti Grant, v. 20 and Guākuci Grant, v. 21.

21. Śulhaṇikarapāṭṭaka, v. 17.

22. Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v. 12.

23. J.R.A.S., VIII, p. 118.

24. Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v. 12.

25. Āpastamba Śrauta, 24, 6, 7.

26. I.H.Q., VI, p. 67.

26a. A Statistical Account of Assam Vol. 1, p. 38.

tions they are credited with living a holy and righteous life. They are said to have assiduously practised the sixfold duties,<sup>27</sup> *yajana*, *yājana*, *adhyayana*, *adhyāpanā*, *dāna* and *pratigraha*. They daily performed the ritual of *snāna* (bath). Six kinds of *snāna* are mentioned in the *smṛti*,<sup>28</sup> namely, *nitya* (daily bath), *naimittiika* (due to some cause), *kāmya* (bath for some desired object), *kriyāṅga* (bath as a part of religious rite), *malāpakarṣana* (a bath solely for cleaning the body), and *kriyā snāna* (ritualistic bathing at a sacred place). The Grant of Balavarman indicates the prevalence of *kriyāṅga snāna*.<sup>29</sup> The Brāhmaṇas observed three *sandhyās*<sup>30</sup> as enjoined by Atri, who says, "a twice-born person possessed of the knowledge of the self should perform three *sandhyās* on adorations". With *sandhyā* is associated *japa* (the muttering of the *Gāyatrī* and other holy mantras) which, it is recorded, the Kāma-rūpa Brāhmaṇas repeated in the three prescribed ways.<sup>31</sup>

The first and foremost duty of Brāhmaṇas was obviously to pursue the study of the Vedas. The inscriptions mention the three Vedas. Among the Vedic sākhās as noted above they specify the *Vājasaneyā*, *Cārakya*, *Taittirīya*, *Bahvṛcya*, *Mādhyandina*, *Kāṇva* and *Chāndogya*. The Grant of Vanamāla states that Bhijjaṭa studied the *Yajurveda* with all its accessories (*sāṅgaya jura vedam adhīta-vān*).<sup>32</sup> Devadatta, according to the Bargāon Grant, was the chief of Vedic scholars, and the Vedas had their aims fulfilled in him (*deradattah kāṇvo agrajo vājasaneyakāgryah, āśādya yan̄ veda-vidām parārddhyam trayyā kṛtārthāyitameva samyak*).<sup>33</sup> It is particularly interesting to note that the most orthodox school of Vedic theology, the *Mīmāṃsā*, was carefully studied.<sup>34</sup>

Besides Vedic studies, Brāhmaṇas cultivated various sciences and arts. The Puṣpabhadrā Grant of Dharmapāla describes the grandfather of the donee as having possessed like the donor, a knowledge of the fine arts (*samyak kalābhīryutāḥ*)<sup>35</sup> which were

27. Bargāon Grant and in others.

28. Śākha Smṛti, VIII. 1-11.

29. v. 32.

30. Puṣpabhadrā Grant, VII. The word *sandhyā* literally means "twilight", but also indicates the action of prayer performed in the morning and evening twilight. As stated the three *sandhyās* are performed at daybreak, at noon, and at sunset.

31. Puṣpabhadrā Grant, *Ibid.*

32. v. 30.

33. v. 16.

34. Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v. 14; Khonāmukhī Grant, J.A.R.S., VIII : p. 119.

35. v. 14.

36. K.S., p. 180.

generally acquired by Kṣatriyas alone. An epithet of this Brāhmaṇa is cāṇakyamāṇikyabhū, which may mean, as suggested by Bhattacharya, that he was as it were, the source of the jewels (i.e. the moral maxims) of Cāṇaka.<sup>36</sup> This may possibly refer to the *Arthaśāstra* and indicate that it was studied. Further, the inscriptions record academic titles such as śrutidhara, pāṇḍita, and kathāniṣha, usually borne by Brāhmaṇas.<sup>37</sup>

It has been shown elsewhere that besides their scriptural duties, the Brāhmaṇas also held high administrative offices. Ministers, administrators and court poets were mostly members of their class. Janārdana Svāmin was a nyāyakarāṇīka in the time of Bhāskaravarman. A few words must be said about Brāhmaṇas following the profession of arms. From very ancient times Brāhmaṇas appear to have wielded arms. Kauṭilya quotes the view of earlier writers that when there are armies composed of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras, each preceding one is better for enlistment than each subsequent one.<sup>38</sup> Something of this tradition seems to have existed in Kāmarūpa. The Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka Grant of Dharmapāla refers to the Brāhmaṇa Himāṅga, who was not only skilled in archery, but also an expert in reading the omens implied in the movement and fall of other people's arrows (*nārāca-mokṣagati-pāṭa-guṇa-pravīṇa*).<sup>39</sup> Further, he was well skilled in different methods of attack and defence (*abhyasta-citra-dṛḍha-duṣkara-karma-mārgaḥ*).<sup>40</sup>

We have stated above that the Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa migrated to the neighbouring provinces where they were honoured with *Brahma-deya* grants. In the copper-plate inscription of Anantavarman, the Ganga king of Kaliṅga (C. 922 A.D.) mention is made of a Brāhmaṇa from Kāmarūpa, named Viṣṇusomācārya, to whom the king's brother Jayavarman made a gift of land at the time of giving away his daughter in marriage (*kanyā-dāna-samaye*). The charter says that Viṣṇusomācārya was a resident of Śringātikāgrahāra in the Kāmarūpa viṣaya; he belonged to the Parāśara gotra and was well versed in the *Veda* and *Vedāṅga* (*veda-vedāṅgapāṭagebhyaḥ kāmarūpaviṣaya-śringātikāgrahāra-vāstavyebhayaḥ parāśarasagotrebhyo viṣṇu-somācāryapādebhyo vivāha-samaye kanyā-dānam udakapūrvram kṛtvā*).<sup>41</sup>

37. Grant of Balavarman.

● 38. Chap. IX, 2.

39. v. 20.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Journal of the Andhra Historical Society*. Vol. II, 271-726; Banerjee: *History of Orissa*, Vol. I, pp. 232-33.

A charter of the Paramāra king Vākpatirāja of Mālwa (c. 981 A.D.) records the gift of land to twenty-six Brāhmaṇas.<sup>42</sup> It appears that some of these Brāhmaṇa donees hailed from eastern India. One of them, Vāmanasvāmin by name was from Paunḍrika in Uttarakūladeśa. This Uttarakūladeśa has been identified by K. L. Barua with Uttar-kūl of Assam,<sup>43</sup> that is to say, the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. The Śilimpur inscription also proves that Brāhmaṇas from Assam migrated to other provinces. It states categorically that the Brāhmaṇa Prahāsa's ancestors migrated to Balagrāma in Puṇḍra from a place in Kāmarūpa.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. OTHER CASTES

Not much information is available about the non-Brāhmaṇa castes. Chief of them were the Karāṇa and the Kāyastha. Both are however noticed in the epigraphs as denoting state officials. Karāṇa occurs as the name of a caste in the old Sūtras and Smṛtis, and perhaps also in the Mahābhārata.<sup>45</sup> But Kṣiravāmin on Amarakośa says that Karāṇa also denotes a group of officers like Kāyasthas and Adhyakṣas (superintendents). The lexicographer Vaijayanti seems to take Kāyastha and Karāṇa as synonymous and explains them as denoting a scribe.<sup>46</sup> It therefore appears that the Karāṇa caste, whose members performed the same vocations as the Kāyasthas, was gradually absorbed by the latter, ultimately forming one Kāyastha caste. The *nyāya-karāṇika*, Janārdana Svāmin of the Nidhanpur Grant appears, however, to be a Brāhmaṇa.<sup>47</sup>

The Kāyastha is mentioned as a royal official in the Viṣṇu and Yājñavalkya Smṛtis. According to the Viṣṇu Smṛti he wrote the public documents (*rājasākṣīka*),<sup>48</sup> and the commentary on the latter explains that his office was that of an accountant and scribe. The term is used in the same sense in the early inscriptions of our province.

The existence of the Kāyastha caste as early as the ninth century A.D. is also known from inscriptions discovered in other parts

42. E.J., Vol. XXIII, Pt. IV.

43. J.A.R.S., Vol. V, 1937-38, pp. 112-115.

44. K.S., p. 161 fn. 2, pp. 164-167.

45. History of Dharmasāstra, II, Pt. I, p. 74.

46. The Rabhasakośa dictionary gives the following eight different meanings of karāṇa : cause (*kāraṇa*), body (*deha*), devotion (*mādhanā*), organs (*indriya*), kāyastha, binding of hair (*keśabandha*), and offspring of a Śūdra mother by Vaiśya father.

47. Pargiter observes that the term *karāṇika* is not a classical Sanskrit, but evidently a word formed from *karana*, J.A.S.B., 1911, p. 501.

48. Viṣṇu Dharmasūtra, VII, 3.

of India. The record of Amoghavarṣa refers to a Kāyastha caste in Western India (*valabha-kāyasthavāṇīśa*),<sup>49</sup> while Northern Indian inscriptions refer to *Gauḍa-kāyastha-vāṇīśa*,<sup>50</sup> Kāyastha-vāṇīśa,<sup>51</sup> *Mathurānvaya Kāyastha*,<sup>52</sup> etc., the inscriptions being dated respectively A.D. 999, 1183 (?) and 1328 A.D. The latter *Smṛti*, *Uśanas*, and *Vedavyāsa*, also refer to the Kāyastha caste. The *Uśanas* gives an uncomplimentary derivation of the name by saying that it is compounded of the first letters of *kāka* (crow), *yama* and *sthapati*, to convey the three attributes of greed, cruelty and the spoliation (or paring characteristic of the three). The *Vedavyāsa Smṛti* includes the Kāyastha among Śūdras along with barbers, potters, and others.<sup>53</sup>

Among modern writers Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar<sup>54</sup> and following him Ghose<sup>55</sup> and others hold that the Kāyasthas were descended from the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas, because of the likeness of their surnames. Vasu, however, opposes this theory and says that "excepting some agreement in respect of surnames, we have got nothing to prove any connection between these Nāgara Bhāhmanas and Kāyasthas. There is no tradition even among the Kāyastha aristocracy of Gauḍa or their kinsmen, the Kāyasthas of Kāmarūpa, nor is there any testimony in the genealogies to the effect that there ever existed between them and the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas or the Brāhmaṇas in general any caste link. Rather the traditions current among them for generations and their genealogical records testify to their affiliation with the Kṣatriyas."<sup>56</sup> Kakati considers the word Kāyastha to be Sanskritisation of non-Aryan formations like *Katho*, to write, *kaiathoh* (to keep accounts). In early Assamese records Kāyasthas are referred to as Kāth.

Lekhaka in our inscriptions is clearly a scribe. Sumantu, who is quoted in the *Parāśara Mādhabīya*, considers food of a Lekhaka along with that of oilman and other low castes as unfit for a Bhāhmana.<sup>57</sup> Lekhaka is, therefore, obviously a caste in the modern sense, but whether it is identical with the Kāyastha caste

49. E.I., XVIII, p. 251.

50. E.I., XII, p. 61.

51. Pro. A.S.B. 1880, p. 78.

52. E.I., XII, p. 64.

53. *History of Dharmakāstra*, II, pt. I, p. 76.

54. I.A., LXI, p. 48.

55. I.H.Q., VI, 60 ff.

56. *Social History of Kāmarūpa*, III, p. 167.

56a. "Some Austric-Sanskrit word correspondences," *New Indian Antiquary*, Vol. No. 3, 1948.

57. II, Pt. I, p. 383.

is doubtful. Bṛhaspati as quoted in the *Śmṛti Candrikā* speaks of the Gaṇaka and the Lekhaka as two persons to be associated with a judge in a court of justice and definitely says that they were *dvijas*.<sup>58</sup> Therefore they were officers and not members of a particular caste. The term is clearly used in this sense in our inscriptions.

The term Vaidya occurs in the Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka Grant, which was composed by Prasthāna Kalasa, who described himself as a Vaidya (*prasthāna-kalasa nāmnā kavināgoverṇa-mānavai-dyena racitā prāstastih*).<sup>59</sup> Bhattacharya points out that it is not likely that the term was used in so early a time to denote caste.<sup>60</sup> But Vaidya as a distinct social group occurs in three South-Indian inscriptions of the eighth century A.D. The members of this group occupied very high positions in state and society; and according to Dr. Krishna Sastri's interpretation, one of them at any rate was regarded as a Brāhmaṇa.<sup>61</sup>

The Grant of Balavarman refers to Bhiṣaka or physician.<sup>62</sup> Bhiṣaka, according to *Uśanas*, was the offspring of a clandestine union between a Brāhmaṇa and a Kṣatriya girl and designated also as Vaidyaka. A Bhiṣaka maintained himself by studying the Ayurveda in its eight parts, or astronomy, astrology and mathematics. According to the *Brahma Purāṇa* (quoted by Aparārka)<sup>63</sup> he lived by surgery and by attending upon patients.

Alongside the Kāyasthas the Kalitās are the predominant caste of the province.<sup>64</sup> "They are now looked on as the purest of the old Hindu people of Assam" and "the only Śūdra caste in the valley from whose hands the higher caste will take water".<sup>65</sup> They claim to same rank as the Kāyasthas and actually rank next to Brāhmaṇas.<sup>66</sup> Martin holds that they were formerly the priests of the Koc, and remarks: "They (the Kalitās) no doubt had some science and continued long to be the only spiritual guides

58. *History of Dharmasāstra*, Op. Cit., p. 76.

59. K.S., p. 154.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

61. E.J., VII, pp. 317-321, XVIII, pp. 291-309; I.A., 1839, pp. 57 ff.

62. v. 21.

63. p. 1171.

64. The name occurs in other parts of India besides Assam, namely, in the Sambalpur district of Orissa, and in Cuttak and Chota Nagpur. In the Tons Valley and Jaumsar Barwar in Nepal there is a class of people called Kaltas. Dalton: *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, pp. 321-322; *Indian Forester*, LX, pp. 683-799.

65. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 79.

66. *Census of India*, 1891. Assam, Vol. I, p. 211.

of the Koc and indeed in some places still retain by far the chief authority over that people".<sup>67</sup> He further mentions that in Assam there were several religious instructors (*gurus*) of this class. The Kalitās are now distributed all over the province and have increased in numerical strength. This was obviously known to the author of the *Fathiya-i-Ibriyah*, who accompanied Mir Jumla throughout his expedition to Assam in 1662 A.D. He states categorically that the inhabitants of the province belonged to two nations, the Ahoms and the Kalitās.<sup>68</sup> Allen amplifies the statement and says that all the Hinduised people of Assam except the Brāhmaṇas were called Kalitās.<sup>69</sup>

There seem to be two views regarding the original home of the Kalitās. In a biography of Bhavānīpuriyā Gopāla Ātā (1541-1611 A.D.) a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, written in Assamese, it is said that Gopāla with his mother came to Acamadeśa from Kalitā-deśa. The same text records that the Kalitā country was to the north-east of Acama and near the regions inhabited by hill-tribes, such as Miris and Abors.<sup>70</sup> This account is corroborated by other writers. Captain John Bryan Neufville, writing on the geography and population of Assam in 1828, stated : "The country to the eastward of Bhot and northward of Sadiya, extending on the plain beyond the mountains is said to be possessed by a powerful nation called Kalitās or Kultās, who are described as having attained to a high degree of advancement and civilization equal to any of the nations of the East. The power, dominion, and resources of the Kultā Rājā are stated to exceed by far those of Assam, under its most flourishing circumstances, and in former times a communication appears to have been kept up between the estates, now long discontinued. To this nation are attributed the implements of husbandry and domestic life, washed down by the flood of the Dihong."<sup>71</sup> Neufville gives a detailed account of the flood that swept away the Kalitādeśa.

According to the popular belief, the Kalitās were Kṣatriyas, who fled from the wrath of Paraśu Rāma, who was determined to exterminate the Kṣatriyas. They fled from home and concealed themselves in the forests of Assam. So, they are *kula*-(caste) *lupta* (gone) or *kalitā* (degraded caste). But this seems to be a bit of false-etymology.

67. *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*. III, p. 545.

68. Galt, pp. 58 ff.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 138; *District Gazetteer*, Nowgong, 78.

70. Kakati : *Kalitā Jātir Itivritta*, pp. 4 ff.

71. *Asiatic Researches*, XVI, pp. 344-345.

The general belief is that the Kalitās came to Assam from outside. In this connection it is interesting to note that among the peoples inhabiting the north of India the Mārkandeya Purāṇa mentions Kultā along with Darada, Gaṇa, etc.<sup>72</sup> Dalton considers them to be Aryans of pure descent, who came to the province before the formation of the existing professional castes.<sup>73</sup> Baden Powell is of opinion that they were formerly Buddhists, and were dispersed from mid-India by the subsequent Brāhmaṇic revival. He refers to the tradition that the oppressed Buddhist, sought refuge in the hills, and remarks that "there are scattered remnants of these once ruling houses still existing under the name Kultā or Kalitā caste".<sup>74</sup> The Kalitās of present-day Assam, however, are good Hindus, and, as said before, rank as a high caste. Martin on the other hand, refers to their unorthodox character, and says that they are independent of the Brāhmaṇa priests.<sup>75</sup> Their unorthodox character is revealed in their custom of widow remarrying and marriage of grown-up girls, both being contrary to orthodox Hindu practice. It should also be noted that differences of sub-caste among the different sub-divisions of the Kalitās are neither wellmarked nor rigid. Gait points out that this appears to be the result of the levelling influence of Buddhism.<sup>76</sup>

Bastian seeks to connect the name Kalitā with Moggalāna Kolitā.<sup>77</sup> It is clear that as a designation of the Maudgalyānaputra Hiuen Tsiang refers to the name Kolika or Kolita. The Koliya, also, appears as one of the names of the ten republican states of the Vrijjian confederacy. The Koliyas of Rāmagrāma were Kṣatriyas and were related to Buddha. By tradition they were agriculturists. The Koliya may be equated with the Kalitā; it may, therefore be suggested that the Kalitās whom Dalton praises as excellent cultivators, having extensive holdings, well-stocked farm-yards, and comfortable houses, are the descendants of the Buddhist Kṣatriyas of the Koliya tribe.<sup>78</sup> Kalitās were thus the Aryan settlers of the Brahmaputra valley who once spread out to the eastern limit of the province.

72. Chap. 55.

73. *Op. Cit.*

74. *The Indian Village Community*, pp. 135 ff.

75. *Op. Cit.*

76. *Census of India*, 1891, Assam, Vol. I, p. 210.

77. Kolita war der Name Mugalanā's des zu der Linken Buddha's stehenden Lieblings Jüngers. Vide A. Bastian: *Völkerstämme am Brahmaputra und Verwandtschaftliche Nachbarn* (1883), p. 45.

78. Kalita Jātīr Itiyāta, p. 43. This note is mainly based on Dr. B. Kakati's book on Kalita Jātīr Itiyāta. Law: *Tribes in Ancient India*, p. 90.

Next to the Kalitās were Koces, who even to-day form a large portion of the population of Assam. In earlier times the inhabitants of the province were, therefore, distinguished as Kalitās (Aryans) and Koces, who probably belong to the Mongolian stock.<sup>78a</sup> The Koces are mentioned as *Kuvācas* in the *Yoginī Tantra*. "The name (Koch) in Assam," remarks Gait, "is no longer that of a tribe, but rather of a Hindu caste into which all converts to Hindus from the different tribes Kachari, Garo, Hajong, Lalung, Mikir, etc., are admitted conversion."

Daivajñas or the astrologers are known as Gaṇakas. According to the *Vṛthaddharma-Purāṇa* the Gaṇaka was born of Śākadvīpi father and Vaiśya mother.<sup>78b</sup> As in Bengal, the Gaṇakas of Assam are specially associated with the worship of the *grahas* or planets. Bariyā is a peculiar caste to Assam formed of the off-spring of Brāhmaṇa and Gaṇaka widows and their descendants. The word Bariyā is said to have derived from *bārī* (*vidhvā*), a widow. But the people prefer to call themselves Sūta. They say that the term is derived from Sūta the expounder of the Purāṇas, who was himself the son of a Brāhmaṇa widow.

The reference to Kaivartas in several inscriptions leads us to believe that they were once prominent in the population of the country. The Kaivarta according to Medhātithi or Manu, was a mixed caste.<sup>79</sup> Manu tells us that the inhabitant of Āryavarta employ the name Kaivarta to denote the off-spring of a Niṣāda from an Ayogava woman, who is also called Mārgava and Dāsa, and who subsists by plying boats. According to the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*,<sup>80</sup> a Kaivarta is born of a Kṣatriya father and a Vaiśya mother. Fick notes that fishermen, who work with nets and baskets, were called in the Jātakas Kevatta.<sup>81</sup> From epigraphs it appears that at least some Kaivartas owned land and lived on agriculture. This agrees with the present divisions of the Kaivarta caste, namely, Hālovā (one who works with the *hāla* or the plough) and Jālovā (one who works with the *jāla* or the throw-net).<sup>82</sup> They seem to have held

78a. In the *Census of India*, 1891, Assam, Gait rightly comes to the conclusion that "whatever may have been the racial affinities of the original Koch tribe, there can be no doubt that the present Koch of Assam belong to the Mongolian rather than to the Dravidian stock" (p. 218).

78b. *Uttara Khanda*, XIII, 52.

79. Ch. X, 4.

80. Ch. X, 34.

81. *Social Gliederung Tr.* p. 302.

82. *Census of India*, 1901, Assam, pt. I, p. 132. *Jāl* is usually the circular net common throughout the east, and specially attributed in India to the Mahratta Bhois and the Telugu Bestars.

office in the state. The Tezpur Rock inscription refers to a Kālvarta, who was in charge of collecting state-toll on the rivers.<sup>83</sup>

Of the other professional castes, we have references to Kumbhakāra (potters), Tantuvāya (weavers), Nauki (Boatmen), and Daṇḍī (towers of boats). According to the *Uśanasas* the Kumbhakāras were the off-spring of the clandestine union of a Brāhmaṇa with a Vaiśya female. Vaikkhānasa agrees with *Uśanasa* and adds that the off-spring becomes either a Kumbhakāra or a barber who shaves parts of the body above the navel. Vedavyāsa and Devala include the Kumbhakāras among Śūdras.<sup>84</sup> In Assam, at present, there are two classes of potters: Kumāra and Hirā.<sup>85</sup> The Hirās are a degraded caste (*antyaja*) and they are frequently spoken of as a sub-caste of the Cāṇḍāla, but they will not eat with the latter, and their occupation is, of course, quite distinct. They differ from the potters of other castes in that their women also work, and that they shape their vessels entirely by hand, instead of by means of wheels. They make them in four stages, each of which, forming a separate ring, is partially dried before the next is added. When the whole is complete they pile the vessels in a heap, with grass between each, to which they can set fire and thus bake the clay.<sup>86</sup>

The Tantuvāyas are regarded as Śūdras by the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patanjali, and, as such, excluded from sacrificial rites.<sup>87</sup> As noted elsewhere, we have several references to Tantuvāyas in the epigraphs. They, however, do not indicate any distinct caste, but only a professional group, for in Assam, all castes including the Brāhmaṇas take to weaving.

We have a single reference to the *antyaja* (low castes) in the Puṣpabhadrā Grant of Dharmapāla. In describing the boundary marks of the land granted, the epigraphs refer to Dijja-rati-hāḍī, whose land marked the east-south boundary.<sup>88</sup> Hāḍī may mean here the Hāri caste of to-day. The Hāris as *antyajas*, are connected with the Doma and the Cāṇḍāla. In Assam their position has of late years much improved; they have taken largely to trade and to working in gold. Many of them now describe themselves by euphemistic terms expressive of these occupations. Such as Br̥tiyāl and Sonāri.<sup>89</sup>

83. J.B.O.R.S., 1917, pp. 508-514.

84. *History of Dharmasāstra*, II, pt. I, p. 78.

85. In Assam Kewat ranks as a superior Śūdra caste and is not ranked along with the Kālvartas as in Bengal and Central Provinces.

86. *Census of India*, 1891, Assam, Vol. I, p. 272.

87. *History of Dharmasāstra*, p. 63.

88. K.S., p. 181, fn. 3.

89. *Census of India*, 1891, Assam, Vol. I, pp. 277-278.

## 4. SOCIAL INSTITUTION

## (i) Family

The smallest unit of society was probably the joint family or large household, comprising the patriarch of the family, his wife, his unmarried daughters, and his sons with their wives and descendants. This is clear from the Nidhanpur Grant where half or more shares of land were granted jointly to several brothers of a family (*bhrātṛtrayena ekāṁśah*; *bhrātrā sahārdhāṁśah*, etc.).<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, cases of separation of property were also not rare. In the Subhankarapāṭaka Grant of Dharinapāla, separate shares of a *pāṭaka* are assigned to two brothers, Himāṅga and Trilocana, indicating that they were no longer members of a joint family,<sup>91</sup> and probably had separate residences.

## (ii) Marriage

Among social institutions that of marriage is, in many ways, the most important. The Hindu Śāstras recognised eight modes of marriage. They are (i) *rākṣasa* or *kṣātra vivāha*, where the bride is carried off by force; (ii) *paiśāca*, a secret elopement; (iii) *gāndharva*, a secret informal union by copulation; (iv) *āsura*, acquirement by purchase; (v) *brāhma*, where the bride is freely given to a worthy bridegroom with due ceremony; (vi) *daiva*, where she is married to a priest; (vii) *ārṣa*, in which the bride's father, in giving her away, receives from the bridegroom a formal gift of a pair of oxen; and (viii) *kāya* or *prājāpatya*, in which the proposal comes from the side of the bridegroom. In the law-books the first three of these modes are recognised as peculiarly appropriate to Kṣatriyas, and the fourth is allowed only to Vaiśyas and Śūdras. The remaining four modes are regarded as particularly suitable to Brāhmaṇas. The *brāhma* form was widespread among the Brāhmaṇas of our country. The Puṣpabhadrā Grant throws some light on the actual rites with which this form of marriage was attended. It records the marriage of Bhāskara to Jīva in the following words: *tasyāḥ kareṇa sa karam jagṛhe gṛhastha-dharmmāya kaṅkaṇa-dharam dhyta-kaṅkaṇena*.<sup>92</sup> This is a clear reference to *pāṇi-grahaṇa*, a rite which is performed either before or after the ceremony of *saptapadī*, in which the bride, accompanied by the bridegroom, takes seven steps towards the north-east. In

90. *Op. Cit.*

91. v. 22.

92. v. 15.

this rite, while the bride sits looking towards the east, the bridegroom facing the north, takes her hand, uttering the verse, "I clasp thy hand for happiness, that thou mayest reach old age with me, thy husband," etc. (*Rg Veda*, 85.36)<sup>93</sup> It is furthermore made clear that girls were given away in marriage only when they were physically fit to be married. From this it may be surmised that the practice of child-marriage had not yet arisen. Marriage within the *varṇa* and *kula* was the prevailing custom, for these social units are defined by their endogamy.

Another equally important fact recorded concerns the Brāhmaṇa youths. As has been said, it was their duty to marry and enter household life after their return from the *guru-gṛha* on the completion of the *samāvartana* rites.<sup>94</sup> After *samāvartana*, in some cases, at any rate, the young Brāhmaṇa used to proceed to the royal court, where he was received by the king and was provided with means to enable him to marry and settle down as a householder.<sup>95</sup> This is quite in agreement with the current theory that a person should not remain without an *āśrama* even for a single moment; if a *snātaka* (would-be householder) was not immediately married, for some days he would be neither a *Brahmacārin* nor a *Gṛhastha*.<sup>96</sup> Mediaeval writers like Mitramiśra even advocated that the *samāvartana* should be performed only when the marriage of the youth was already settled.<sup>97</sup>

Of the other forms of marriage, *rūkṣasa*, *paiśāca*, and *śura* seem to have been in vogue as now with the lower order of the people.<sup>98</sup> Even the orthodox *brāhma* form has assimilated many popular customs, traditions and superstitions. It will therefore be interesting to refer to a few peculiar rites and procedures followed in Assam along with the Vedic rites. Marriage is usually arranged after *rāhi-jorācovā*, the consultation of the horoscopes of the pair. In some parts of the province even bride-price (*gā-dhana*) is paid. The nuptial festivities begin five, three or two days before the day fixed for wedding. On the commencing day a party from the bridegroom's house leaves for the bride's house with clothes, ornaments, food-stuff and a sacramental jar of water. The bride is presented with the bridal dress and ornaments. This ceremony is called *joron-diyā* or *tekeli-diyā* or *telar bhāra*. During three

93. *Antiquities of India*, pp 115-116; 143-144.

94. Grant of Balavarman, v. 31.

95. *Ibid.*

96. Altekar: *Education in Ancient India*, p. 39.

97. p. 575.

98. Vijayabhusana Ghosa Choudhury: *Āsama O Vāngadeśara Vivāha-Paddhati*, p. 5.

days, the bride and the bridegroom are to undergo ceremonial baths known as *novani*; (Skt. *snāna* > *nāhāna*) the water for this purpose is carried by women in a procession from the nearby river or tank. The night before the fixed day of marriage is the *adhibāsa*, which is followed by a local rite known as *gāthiyana-khundā*. In this ceremony, an aromatic root called *gāthiyana* is placed upon a flat stone, and is pounded with a muller held by seven married women. Whilst the operation goes on, songs appropriate to the occasion are sung by another party of women. When the root has been reduced to powder, it is put on the head of the bride. At the dawn of the marriage day the *daiyana* ceremony is performed, by making the bride sit at the door of her sleeping apartment. One of the female relations kneels down before her with two betel leaves, one in each hand, and who having dipped the leaves in some curd touches her cheeks, arms and feet with these leaves so moistened.

The usual practice is that the bridegroom should come to the bride's house on the marriage day in an auspicious hour in the evening. Before the departure of the party another rite is conducted by the women. The female relations proceed to a bathing ghat with music; one of the women carries on her head a bamboo tray (*dalā*) containing seven lamps and another a winnowing fan (*kulā*) on which are placed a copper coin fastened in a piece of cloth along with rice-powder. The latter woman, called *kulābuḍi*, strikes the fan with a stick, and on their arrival on the ghāt they perform certain rites known as *suvāg-tolā* (*saubhāgya*). On the evening of the third day after marriage the married couple together make an offering to two demons known as *khobā-khubunī*. Marriage is consummated after this ceremony.<sup>99</sup>

##### 5. WOMEN

There are references in the *prāśastis* to queens, women officers of the royal palace, and to the wives of the Brāhmaṇa donees. From the fact that the copper plates in their set lists of officials, include the name *rājñī*, it seems that the queen held a position of some responsibility in the state. The inscriptions make it plain that they were cultured and pious women. Queen Jīvadā, the mother of Harjaravarman like *prabhāta sandhyā* (morning twilight) was worshipped by many, and was considered to be the source of great spiritual force.<sup>100</sup> In Harjara's own record she is compared

99. For detailed description see H. C. Barua: *Notes on the Marriage System of the People of Assam*, Sibsagar, 1909.

100. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 10.

with Kuntī and Subhadrā.<sup>101</sup> Nayana, wife of Gopāla, was a queen of wide fame (*mahanīyakīrtih*).<sup>102</sup> Harṣapāla's queen Ratnā and the Brāhmaṇa lady Paukā were well-reputed for their works of piety and charity, and were described as being like the goddess Pārvatī.<sup>103</sup>

Chastity and devotion to their husbands were the main qualities of Brāhmaṇa women who are mentioned in the epigraphs. Ratnāpāla's Bargāon Grant speaks of Syāmayikā, wife of the Brāhmaṇa Sadgaṅgādatta who was devoted to her husband and endowed with every virtue, and shone like a streak (crescent or quarter) of the moon, pure in form and dispelling the darkness.<sup>104</sup> The second grant of the same king says of Ceheppāyikā that she was a woman charming and true in faith, and that her beauty was her own ornament,<sup>105</sup> and as such she was like Lakṣmī. Durlabhā, the wife of Purandrapāla, as a consort of her husband was as Śacī of the god Indra, the goddess Śivā of Sambhū, Rati of Madana, Lakṣmī of Hari, and Rohinī of the Moon-god. Indrapāla's grant mentions Saukhāyikā and Anurādhā as being well conducted, virtuous, chaste and according pleasure to their husbands by steadfast devotion. Anurādhā is likened to Arundhatī the wife of the sage Vaśiṣṭha for her purity of character and in point of holiness to the river Gaṅgā.

Motherhood was one of the outstanding aims in married life; women are therefore represented as mothers of ideal sons. Jivadā, the mother of Harjaravarman is described as being like Kuntī, the mother of Yudhiṣṭhira, and Subhadrā, the mother of Abhimanyu. The Nidhanpur plates describe Yajñavatī the mother of Mahendravarman as resembling the sacrificial wood which produces fire. Widowhood was considered to be the highest calamity of women, but there is no mention of sātī. Damodara Gupta's Kuṭṭanīmatam, however refers that a concubine of Bhāskaravarman became Satī after the king's death.<sup>106</sup> According to the *Yoginī Tantra* only in Mukti-tīrtha self immolation on the funeral pyre of husband was enjoined to the widows of Brāhmaṇas. Sudra and Vaiśya widows moved by deep sense of love were also enjoined to burn themselves. This practice of Satī was however definitely prohibited to unchaste women and women having many children.<sup>107</sup>

101. v. 11.

102. Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v. 5.

103. Subhaṅkarapāṭaka Grant, v. 11.

104. v. 18.

105. v. 18.

106. Kāvyamālā, pt. III, p. 77, v. 549.

107. Y.T. II, v. 302-308.

Some details of the life of town women as well as of the secular and sacred courtesans, can be gleaned from the epigraphs. Capriciousness is said to be a trait of the women of the town.<sup>108</sup> The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla refers to the sensual excesses of the city damsels and to their indulgence in intoxicating spirits. Some description of the bodily charm and feminine beauty of the women of the town of Apunarbhava were given in the *Yoginī Tāntra*. The women of the sacred city of Apunarbhava were joyful ; they were lean in the middle ; their lotus eyes were extended to the ears. breasts were heavy and lofty, buttocks were well formed, cheeks were shining like the moon and the necks were adorned with necklaces. Their girdles and anklets produced a sonorous jingling sound.<sup>109</sup> The *purdah* system was obviously unknown, and women used to bathe openly in rivers.<sup>110</sup>

The Bargāon Grant further mentions the *vesyā* and *varastrī*, both meaning courtesans, who generally resided in the best streets of the city. The *Purāṇas* have laid down that the woman who lends her couch to five husbands is called *vesyā*.<sup>111</sup> The custom of appointing women as dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services which probably came into vogue in India about the third century A.D.<sup>112</sup> became quite common in Assam. Vanamāla in his Tezpur Grant made gifts of *vesyās* to the temple of Hāṭakeśvara Śiva.<sup>113</sup> These women dedicated to temple services were usually known as *Nāṭī* and *Daluhāṅganā*. Dr. Kakati considers the expression *Daluhāṅganā* to be an Austric formation from *daluha* (temple) and *āṅganā* (women).<sup>114</sup> The duties of the *Nāṭīs* or dancing girls were to fan the idol with *cāmara* or Tibetan ox-tails,<sup>115</sup> to prepare garlands, and to sing and dance before the god. They seem to have lived a life of cultured ease and pleasure. They were beautiful and attractive to all minds and they adorned themselves with various ornaments.<sup>116</sup> In connection with the story of the dancing girl Rūpiṇikā, employed in a temple at Mathurā, Penzer has discussed in detail the institution of sacred prostitution in India and elsewhere. However, while giving a full account of the practice of *Devadāsīs* in Central and South India, he finds "practically no mention of

108. Bargāon Grant.

109. II, 9, v. 26 ff.

110. Grant of Vanamāla.

111. *History of Prostitution in India*, p. 154.

112. Altekar : *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, pp. 214-215.

113. v. 24.

114. *New Indian Antiquary*, IV, p. 390.

115. Grant of Vanamāla.

116. *Ibid.*

temple or sacred prostitution in Northern India."<sup>117</sup> Contrary to this observation of Penzer's the custom was prevalent in Assam up to the modern period. In most of the Śiva temples there was a class of people known as *Nāṭa* who provided the temple with dancing girls and singers.<sup>118</sup> That in even in later times the *Nāṭis* held a privileged position is known from the fact that the Āhom king Śiva Simha (1714-1744 A.D.) not only married Phuleśwari, a *Nāṭi* attached to a Śiva temple,<sup>119</sup> but subsequently made her the *Bar Rājā* or the chief queen, and caused coins to be struck jointly in her name and his.<sup>120</sup> In this connection passing reference may here be made to the virgin-worship, *kumārī-pūjā*, which was once so prevalent in the province.<sup>121</sup>

As a side-light upon the education of women the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva informs us that its *prāśasti* was composed by Manoratha, son of the Brāhmaṇa Rājaguru Murāri, and Padmā his wife.<sup>122</sup> It appears that many of the women specially of the Brāhmaṇa caste, were not only educated, but skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric. It was the practice of high class women to engage scholars to read out to them the contents of popular classics and scriptures, and informative literature like *Haragaurīsaṃvāda* was generally included in this category. The captivating consort of the king of Kamatā was in the habit of listening to the reading out of *Haragaurīsaṃvāda* and the *Bhāgavata* by the learned and youthful son of the royal priest. The result was disastrous to the happiness of the youthful pair, the queen and the reader, and three kingdoms were involved in this disaster. Sculptures of the period portray that women cultivated music and dancing.

Personal names of women usually consisted of four, three or two syllables. Vedic and Purāṇic gods, goddesses, heroes and heroines and *nakṣatras* formed a large portion of proper names both of women and men. Nomenclatures as *Nayanā*, *Netrā* are derived from peculiarities of body ; *Saukhyāyikā*, *Sudarśanā* were given out of affection. The queens and Brāhmaṇa females held the honorific titles *Devi* and *Vati*. Female names usually ended in *a* (*Ratnā*, *Subratā*), lengthened by the pleonastic suffixes *āyikā* (*Śyamāyikā*, *Saukhyāyikā*), *-i*, *-ī* (*Kāli*, *Gaurī*), *-u* (*Renū*), *-ni*, *ṇi*

117. *The Ocean of Story*, I, Appendix IV, p. 239.

118. The *Nāṭ* is usually a Kalitā caste. *Census of India*, 1901, Assam, part I, p. 141.

119. *Purani Asama Burañji*, pp. 82-83.

120. Gait, pp. 183-184.

121. *The Yoginī Tantra* gives a detailed description in Book I, Chap. 17, v. 33 ff.

122. *Op. Cit.*

C, 16

(Sarpiṇṇi). The personal names are mostly of Sanskrit origin with a good sprinkling of *deśya* elements. Suffixes added to male names are -a (Soma), -i (Orangi), iyā (Kāliyā), -u (Madhu, Sādhu), -e (Cande), -oka (Khāsoka), -t, t̄ (Bhijjata). Names of Brāhmaṇas were often accompanied by suitable *upapadas* or complements as -īvara, -indra, -kara, -kīrti, -kuṇḍa, -kula, -gaṇa, -ghoṣa, -dāma, -dāsa, -datta -dhara, nāga, -nanda, -nandi, -patra, -pālita, -pāla, -pakṣa, -prabha, -bhaṭṭi, -bhava, -bhūti, -mādhavā, -mitra, -mātri, -rāta, -ratha, -vara, -vasu, -soma, -siṁha, -śakti, -hara. Female names were used for males with masculine complements as Gaṅgāsvāmi, Gāyatṛipāla, Sāvitrideva. Opprobrious names although not numerous occur, as in Kusmāṇḍapatra. Bhaṭṭi or Bhaṭṭa which was one of the suffixes also found as prefix in such names as Bhaṭṭinanda, Bhaṭṭimahēśvara. The commonest *upapadas* of Kṣatriyas as revealed in the names of the kings were *Deva*, *Pāla*, *Māla*, *Varmā* and *Stambha*.

## 6. Food

Rice, fish, meat, fruits and vegetables constituted the chief articles of food. From *anna* (rice) mixed with milk were prepared *pāyasa* and *dugdhānna*. *Modaka* and *piṣṭaka* of various kinds were made from rice-flour and *guḍa* (molasses).<sup>123</sup> Buffalo-milk and curd and ghee prepared from it seemed to have been in use.<sup>124</sup> The earlier literatures make mention of twenty-five and fifty kinds of set special dishes (*vyañjana*) prepared with vegetables, pulses, fish and meat. Spices such as ādraka (ginger), jīraka (cumin), pippaliyuka (long pepper), marica (pepper) karpūra (camphor), sariṣā (mustard) were used in these preparations.<sup>125</sup> Common edible herbs were mūlaka, rājaka, vāstuка, pālāṅga, nālikā, śukna (cūka),<sup>126</sup> laphā, caṅga (cānigeri) dhekīyā (a kind of fern) and so forth.<sup>127</sup> With the young banana plant<sup>128</sup> and green bamboo shoots

123. Bahū bidhā piṣṭā kṣira modaka bīṣṇa.

124. Māhīṣāt varjjayenmāṃśām kṣirāṇi dadhi glertam tathā—Yogini Tantra, 11/9-257.

125. ādrakam lareñcaiva jīrakam pippaliyakam—Yogini Tantra 11/7-186.

Hāladi marica hīṅgaka diyā....

Ādā lona jani jīrū māchara pabita

—Kumdra Harana, v. 207.

126. Yogini Tantra 11/9.

127. For different methods of preparations of curries (*vyañjana*) see Kumdra Harana, v. 208-9, and the section on *Randhanaprakarana* in the Dākāra Vacana.

128. Hog-meat with soft roots of plantain tree was made into a delicious preparation.—Kumāra Harana, v. 208.

were made relishing popular preparations known respectively as *pacalā* and *kharicā*. Various fruits such as *cakalā*, *thekerū*, *tenteli*, *ay* (*Dillenis indica*) were used to make sour preparations. Meat and fish comprised common articles of diet. Fish-eating is probably a pre-Aryan custom and in Assam it might have been borrowed from the Mongolian people. The different devices of catching fish were also introduced by these people. Such words as *Lāngi* (a kind of fishing net), *Khokā* (a kind of fish trap), are no doubt of Tibeto-Burman origin.<sup>129</sup> The serpent-shaped and the scaleless fishes were generally forbidden for the upper castes (*matsyāṁśca salkahināṁśca sarpākārāṁśca varjjayet*).<sup>130</sup> The *Yoginī Tantra* recommends in most emphatic words the eating of meat and fish in *Kāmarūpa* (*Kāmarūpe na tyajet sāniṣam*). Sacrifice of various kinds of animals was considered very meritorious. Both the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra* describe in details the nature of the merits of such animal sacrifices. Among the animals whose flesh the *Yoginī Tantra* recommends are ducks, pigeons, tortoises, and wild boars (*hamsa-pārāvataṇi bhakṣyam kürmaṇi varāham eva ca kāmarūpe parityāgāddurgatistasya sambhavet*). Besides flesh of goats, deer, antelopes, rhinoceroses, iguanas are also sanctioned food. Ordinarily females of all animals are excluded. It is also note-worthy that in Assam unlike the other provinces of India, the Brāhmaṇas and the Vaiṣṇavas both eat meat and fish without any social bar or comment.

#### 7. ARTICLES OF LUXURY

In an earlier chapter, it has been noticed that *aguru*, sandal, and musk were well-known products of Assam. It is, therefore, apparent that perfumes and cosmetics were used by the people, especially by people of wealthy classes. They also played an important part in rituals. "With perfume," says the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, "one meets his desire. It also increases merit, begets wealth, and brings liberation."<sup>131</sup> The same text distinguishes the following five kinds of perfumes that were in common use, classified according to their different kinds and the mode of their preparations: *cūrṇikṛta* (powder), *ghṛṣṭa* (paste), *dāhakarṣita* (ashes), *sammard-daja rasa* (juice), *prānyaṅgodbhava* (e.g. musk).<sup>132</sup>

Anointing the body with scented oil before bath was, and still is, a common practice. One inscription states that women used

129. *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, § 77.

130. *Yoginī Tantra* 11/3-275.

131. Chap. 69, v. 53.

132. *Ibid.*, v. 37.

perfumes and anointed their breasts with odorous substances.<sup>133</sup> Sandal-paste seems to have been a favourite material. Harṣa is said to have sent to Hamsavega, the Assamese ambassador to his court, the remains of his toilet sandal enclosed in a polished cocoanut wrapped in a piece of white cloth.<sup>134</sup> A rich perfume was prepared with *kṛṣṇā-guru* oil, which was generally preserved in Bamboo tubes, "wrapped round with sheaths of kapotika leaves".<sup>135</sup> Āñjana, (eye salve) was also used. *Karpūra* (camphor) which was "cold, pure, and white as bits of ice" was also in use.<sup>136</sup> Musk was used to a very considerable extent in the preparation of cosmetics. Hamsavega brought to the court of Harṣa sacks of woven silk (*paṭṭasūtra-sevārkar-pitānsca*) containing jet-black pieces of black aloe wood, *gośīrṣa candana*, camphor, *kasturikākoṣā*, (musk), *kakkola* sprays.<sup>137</sup>

Much attention was paid to the beautification of the face. Hluen Tsiang records that the people of India stained their teeth red or black.<sup>138</sup> This custom of reddening or darkening the teeth as a mode of *prasādhana* (ornamentation) is testified by the *Yoginī Tantra* and was largely prevalent among the women of Assam.<sup>139</sup>

Among other articles of luxury were hand-fans, garlands, and "jewelled mirrors (*māṇimaya darpaṇa*) used by the women in their coquettries."<sup>140</sup> Combs of various designs were made of elephant-tusk, wood and bamboo.<sup>140a</sup> Vallabhadeva's plates refer to sandals with straps and decorated with jewels.<sup>141</sup> Foot-wears were made both of deer-hide (*upānaha*) and wood. Wooden foot-wear known as *khadām* are commonly used by village people. Umbrellas were also in use and it is stated in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* that they were made of woven cloth.<sup>142</sup> We have already referred to the *Abhoga* umbrella, the family heirloom of Kāmarūpa kings, which manifested many wonder-moving miracles.<sup>143</sup> The umbrella was considered as the symbol of kingly authority and was spread over the

133. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 30.

134. Loc. Cit.

135. Cowell, 214.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Watters, I, p. 151.

139. Pt. II, Chap. IX, v. 15.

140. Bargāon Grant.

140a. Combs made of bamboo are known in Assamese as *Kākai* (*Kākkatikd*).

141. Op. Cit.

142. Loc. Cit.

143. Cowell, pp. 213-14.

heads of idols of gods and goddesses. It was also used to be given as a gift as known from the gift of the *Ābhogachatra*. During the Āhom period a kind of umbrella known as *jāpi* was very much in use. There were different types of *jāpis* for king, queen, princes, nobles, and other different classes of citizens. These however, were often carried in front to indicate the status and rank of the person.

Spirituos liquors of various kinds were used. One of these alcoholic drinks was known as *ullaka*. Bhāskarvarman sent to Harsa as a royal present "cups of *ullaka* diffusing the fragrance of sweet wine".<sup>144</sup> The expression *madhumada* in the Bargāon Grant, which Hoernle takes to mean "intoxication with wine" also indicates the use of alcohol. The *Yoginī Tantra* enjoins worship of the goddess Kāmeśvari with wine, meat and blood (*rudhirair-māṇisa madaisca pūjoyet parameśvarīm* (II.7.19)).<sup>145</sup> *Lāopāni* or rice beer is even to-day is the national beverage of the various tribes of Assam and it is offered also in the worship of tribal deities. Another common practice, still in use to-day, was the eating and chewing of *tāmbūla* (areca-nut), both ripe and unripe, together with betel-leaf and lime. In India, the custom of chewing unripe betel-nut exists only in Assam; this has been recorded both in the *Harsacarita* as well as in the accounts of the Mohammedan historians. The *Fathiya-i-Ibriyāb* states that the people of Assam ate *pāñ* in large quantities with unripe *supāri*, unshelled.<sup>146</sup> The *Yoginī Tantra* says that the women of Assam would always be chewing betel-nut; *tāmbūlāśāḥ sadā bhavet*.<sup>147</sup> Areca-nut and betel-leaf, *tāmol pāñ* as they are called in Assamese, have a definite place in many religious and ceremonial functions. They are the first thing offered to a visitor; to receive it from a prince or priest is considered a special honour.<sup>148</sup> In burial, the Khasis place betelnuts on the pyre and bid farewell to the deceased, saying, "Good-bye, go and eat betel-nut in the house of god."<sup>149</sup> Time and distance are even now computed by the village people by the interval required to chew a nut.

144. Cowell, 214.

145. J.A.S.B., Vol. 67. Pt. I, p. 117, f.n. 20.

146. J.A.S.B., XLI. pt. I, p. 81.

147. Loc. Cit.

148. It is generally believed that *tāmbūla* was originally used by the Austro-Asiatic people. Assam being the seat of these people, it is natural that *tāmbūla* should be in common use in the province. *Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian*, pp. 16-19.

149. *The Khasis*, p. 134.

## 8. DRÉSS AND ORNAMENTS

Textile materials, according to the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, are divided into the following four classes : *kārpāsa* (cotton), *kambala* (wool), *balka* (bark), and *koṣaja* (silk from cocoons).<sup>150</sup> Cotton cloth was extensively used, and there was a special class of weavers (*tanturāyas*). *Kambala* was a texture of fine wool (sheep's wool or goat's hair); most probably it was imported from Bhutan or Tibet. In the life of Hiuen Tsiang Bhāskaravarman is said to have made a gift of a cap to the pilgrim. It was called *ho-la-li*, and was made out of coarse skin lined with soft down, and was designed to protect the pilgrim from rain whilst on the road.<sup>151</sup> *Ho-la-li*, whose Sanskrit equivalent is suggested as *ral* by Watters,<sup>152</sup> is perhaps the same as the *śallaka* of the *Amarakoṣa*<sup>153</sup> used for a variety of woollen cloths. With *lomaja* may be mentioned skins and hides which were also used for clothing purposes, for in the list of royal presents to Harṣa were loads of *pariveśa* made of *Kardaraṅga* leather with charming borders, and also pillows made of *samuraka* (deer) leather.<sup>154</sup>

*Balka* denotes fibres and fibre-made fabrics in general. Kāśidāśa (16th century A.D.) the author of the Bengali version of the *Mahābhārata*, describes how the *Kirātas*, forming the army of Bhagadatta, tied their loin cloths with *siari*,<sup>155</sup> which is supposed to be derived from *stikhala* on account of the climbing habit of the plant. But of the bark fibres fit for weaving into cloth *kṣauma* was by far the most important in ancient times. According to the commentator, Kulluka (15th century A.D.), *kṣauma* was a cloth made of *atasi* fibre. From references in both the epics, we gather that *kṣauma* was either regarded as specially fit to be worn on festive occasion, or was itself so finely woven that it was a fit raiment for queens.<sup>156</sup> That *kṣauma* was highly valued in ancient days is also evident from the *Mahābhārata*, in which it is stated that Arjuna brought away valuable *kṣauma* cloths from his conquest of Uttarakuru beyond the Himalayas on the west.<sup>157</sup> Also, Bhāskaravarman sent as presents to Harṣa *kṣauma* cloths "pure

150. Chap. 69, v. 2.

151. p. 189.

152. Watters, I, p. 148.

153. *Amarakoṣa*, II, 6, 116.

154. *Op. Cit.*

155. *Sabhā Parva*.

156. For these references see Ray: Textile Industry in Ancient India, J.B.O.R.S., III, p. 192.

157. *Sabhā Parva*.

as the autumn moon's light".<sup>158</sup> *Dukūla* was the usual name for the finest *kṣauma* and it is referred to in the *Bargāon Grant* as being used for flags.<sup>159</sup> Bāṇa too mentions that the *Ābhoga* umbrella sent to Harṣa by Bhāskaravarman was wrapped in *dukūla* (*dukūla-kalpitaccha nicolakū-dakocit*).<sup>160</sup> The *Arthaśāstra* in the chapter on the Royal Treasury, mentions the places of manufacture of the best kinds of *dukūla*. It states that *dukūla* that was produced in Suvarṇakuḍya (Assam) was as "red as the sun, as soft as the surface of the gem, woven while the threads were very wet and of uniform or mixed texture", and was considered as the best.<sup>161</sup> It is, therefore, evident that Assam even in the fourth century A.D. was celebrated for *dukūla* fit to be kept in the Royal treasury.<sup>162</sup>

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* refers to hemp cloth (*sāñavarastram*) which was probably worn by ordinary people.<sup>163</sup> The use of hemp fabrics is also known from the account of Hiuen Tsiang. He mentions *sāñaka* as a dark red cloth made of the fibre of the *sāñaka* plant (a kind of hemp) and used by the bhikṣus.<sup>164</sup>

*Koṣaja* or *kauṣeya* seems to be the silk obtained from the cocoons of various kinds of silk worms. Commercially silk is of two kinds: wild silk and true silk. Wild silk as the name implies, is the product of silk-worms which feed on the leaves of various trees and plants growing in the forests. True silk is the product of the mulberry silkworm. The wild silks of Assam are derived from two species of worms: *Eri* or *Erandī* (*Attacus ricini*) and *mugā* (*Antheraea Assamica*). The *Eri* cloth is of a drab colour, and, though often coarse in texture, is very durable. It is light but warm; the ordinary cold season wrap of the Assamese villager is generally made of this cloth.<sup>165</sup> J. C. Ray wants to identify it with *patronā* mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra*.<sup>166</sup> Kauṭilya says that of all *patronās* those obtained from Suvarṇakuḍya (in Assam) were the best.<sup>167</sup> *Kṣirasvāmī*, a commentator of the *Amarakoṣa*,

158. *Op. Cit.*

159. *Amarakoṣa*, II, 6, 116.

160. *Op. Cit.*

161. *Shamasastry*, Tr. p. 82.

162. K. L. Barua identifies *dukūla* with the *mugā* silk of Assam. "Kṣauma, *dukūla* and *patronā*", *J.A.R.S.*, VIII, pp. 77-81.

163. *Op. Cit.*

164. Watters, I, p. 120.

165. Stack: *Silk in Assam* (Notes on some Industries of Assam, 1884-1895), pp. 6-12; Darrah: *Eri Silk of Assam* (do), pp. 77-III.

166. *J.B.O.R.S.*, III, p.

167. *Op. Cit.*

describes it as silk spun by insects feeding on leaves of the banyan and lakuca.<sup>168</sup>

The present-day scientific name of the mugā silkworm (*Antheraea Assamica*) denotes its peculiar connection with Assam, and it is, in fact, found in no other part of India except Dehra Dun, where it occurs sparingly.<sup>169</sup> There is a variety of mugā called campā mugā ; its worm feeds on the leaves of the campā tree (*Michelia champaka*). Watts tells us that this "was the fine white silk worn by the Ahom kings and nobles of Assam in former times". Another kind of mugā is known as Mejānkari, the worm feeding on Mejānkari or Adākari trees (*Tetranthera polyantha*).<sup>170</sup> The Mejānkari silk as reported by Hamilton, constituted the dress of the higher ranks, most of it being dyed red with lac.<sup>171</sup> True silk, the modern Assamese white pāt silk, is called pātta, and is the product of *Bombyx textor* and *Bombyx croesi*, which feed on mulberry trees. In the *Harṣacarita*, in the context given above, reference is made to sacks woven out of pāṭasūtra (silk yarns).<sup>172</sup>

The art of dyeing both yarn and cloth, was well-known ; and four primary colours, namely, white, red, yellow, and black or blue were recognised. As regards the coloured garments, red and yellow seem to have been regarded as auspicious,<sup>173</sup> though the Kālikā Purāṇa forbids the use of garments of blue and red for religious purposes. (*nīlī-raktantu yadvastram tat sarvatra vivarj-jitam*).<sup>174</sup> In this connection it may be pointed out that dyeing is very common even among the hill tribes of Assam. The wearing of white or fawn coloured cloths is as much the exception in the hills as it is the rule in the plains. All the tribes in the hills surrounding the province prefer the coloured raiment. The dominant colours are usually either black or dark blue or red. Some of the Naga tribes in particular are very expert dyers and produce extremely brilliant and handsome colours. The Manipuris have also long been known as skilful and artistic dyers, and they still maintain their reputation in this respect. The late Major

168. *Amarakosa*, ed. Haradatta, p. 157.

169. B. C. Allen : *Monograph on the Silk cloths of Assam* 1898.

170. Stack : *Op. Cit.*, pp. 13-21.

171. Francis Hamilton : *An Account of Assam* (first compiled in 1807-1814), ed. S. K. Bhuyan, p. 62.

172. *Op. Cit.*

173. *raktam kauśeyavastrañca mahādevyai praisnyate  
pitam tathaiva kauśeyam vāsudevāya cotsrjet*

— Kālikā Purāṇa, Chap. 69, 8.

174. *Ibid* ; Duncan : *Monograph on dyes and dyeing in Assam*, (1896) pp. 6-7.

Trotter made very careful enquiries as to the materials they use for dyeing, and it was found that some of the plants used were not known to yield dyes at all, while one or two of them were absolutely new to science.

Embroidered (*vicitra*) cloth was also manufactured, and the gift of such cloths to gods and goddesses was considered meritorious (*vicitram sarva-devebhyo devibhyo'sum nivedayet*).<sup>175</sup> The presents sent by Bhāskaravarman to Harṣa included pieces as smooth as birch bark (*bhūrjatvak-komalāḥ jātīpattikāḥ*) or smooth painted silks (*citrapaṭānāṁ ca madriyāśām*).<sup>176</sup> The *jātī-pattikāḥ* does not mean loin cloth as suggested by Cowell. It may mean as its literal meaning suggests (*jātī*, jasmine, *pattikāḥ*, silken strips), long strips of silk (*kamarabandha*) in which the patterns of jasmine flowers were interwoven. Its comparison with the birch bark indicates that perhaps it was the *mugā* silk which is very soft and tawny in colour like birch bark.<sup>177</sup> The biography of Saṅkaradeva refers to a scroll of cloth named *Vṛndabaniyā kāpor* wherein the weavers of Tāntikuci (near Barpetā) with coloured yarns had woven the various scenes from the early life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The scroll was so heavy that sixty men were required to lift it up.

Clothes in general were known by the names *rāstra* and *āechā-dana*.<sup>178</sup> They were both uncut and tailored or stitched (*sūcīrid-dham*).<sup>179</sup> The dress of the people as revealed in the sculptures of the period consisted of a single unstitched undergarment (*paridhāna*) like the present-day *dhoti*. This was worn wrapped round the waist, and hardly reached below the knee. It was held tight at the waist by a girdle (*pariveśa*) consisting of three or more bands, fastened together by means of a knob in the centre, just below the navel. Sometimes one end of the garment was allowed to hang in graceful folds in the front. The use of the *pariveśa*, waist-band, is known also from the *Harṣacarita*, for Bāṇa records that Harṣa gave one to Hāṃsavega, whereof one part had clusters of clear pearls.<sup>180</sup> The same authority mentions a *pariveśa* made of leather. Besides undergarments the people of higher social status dressed in upper robes such as *uttariyā* and *uttarivāsañga*.<sup>181</sup>

175. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Loc. Cit.

176. *Op. Cit.*

177. Mati Chandra : The History of Indian Costume from the 3rd to the end of the 7th Century A.D., J.I.S.O.A., Loc. Cit.

178. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Loc. Cit.

179. *Ibid.*

180. Cowell, p. 215.

181. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Loc. Cit.

Women too, appear to have worn two garments, the upper and the lower. The lower garments descended from the stomach to the ankles and was fastened by means of *nivībandha*. The present-day dress of Assamese women, however, bears no resemblance to the dress described here. Now their dress comprises of three garments, namely, *mekhelā*, *rihā* and *celēng*. The *mekhelā* is a sort of petticoat in the form of an elongated sack open at both ends. It is worn by adjusting it either above the breast or round the waist. When adjusted round the waist the *mekhelā* reaches to the ankles. The *rihā* is a kind of ornamented scarf which is wrapped round the waist. Over the *rihā* is placed a kind of shawl known as the *celeng*. The Bargāon Grant mentions *vakṣah-kavāṭa-paṭa* a garment generally worn by kings and nobles to protect the chest, possibly some kind of armour.

For the use of headgear we have to go to the sculptures. The Chinese writer Hwui li, however, informs us that Bhāskaravarman wore a tiara in the religious convocation held at Kanauj.<sup>182</sup> The Ahom kings and the dignitaries used to wear *pāguri* (headdress). Cazim remarks that the Assamese 'tie a cloth round their heads and another upon their loins and throw a sheet round their shoulders; but it is not customary in that country to wear turbans, robes, drawers and shoes.' The cloth referred to by Cazim may probably be the present-day *mūrat bandhā*.

The ornaments worn by men and women on different parts of their bodies were of different designs. The Kālikā Purāṇa names the following forty different types: *kirīṭa*, *śivoratna*, *kundala*, *lalāṭikā*, *talapatra*, *hāra*, *graireyaka*, *urmmikā*, *prālambikā*, *ratna-sūtra*, *uttāṅga*, *akṣamālikā*, *pārśvadyota*, *nakhadyota*, *aṅguliachādaka*, *jutālaka*, *mānavaka*, *mūrdhatārā*, *khalantikā*, *aṅgada*, *rāhuvalaya*, *śikhābhūṣaṇa*, *iṅgikā*, *prāgaṇḍa vandha*, *udbhāsa*, *nābhipūra*, *mālikā*, *saptakī*, *śrīkhalā*, *dantapatra*, *karmaka*, *īrūsūtra*, *nīvi*, *muśivandha*, *prakīrnaka*, *pādāṅgada*, *hāṃsaka*, *nūpura*, *kṣudraghaṇṭikā*, and *mukhapaṭṭa*.<sup>183</sup> These were made of both gold and silver. The Kālikā Purāṇa, however, forbids the wearing of silver ornaments above the neck (*grīvordhvadeśe rauḍyantu na kadācicca bhūṣanam*). It also enjoins that ornaments made of other metals, except iron and bellmetal (*kāmsya*) should be worn on the lower part of the body.<sup>184</sup> At present, in some places, men also adorn their necks with ornaments. Most of the neck-ornaments

182. Op. Cit., p. 177.

183. Chap. 69. v. 17-21.

184. Ibid.

(*hära*) seen in the sculptures were made of beads. Some strings were very long and reached the navel. Sometimes pendants were hung from the middle of necklaces, which in Assamese are called *dugdugis*.<sup>185</sup> Some neck-ornaments are called *galpaṭā*; so named because the broad band lies flat on the neck. The *aṅgada* and the *kcyūra* were worn on the upper arm. In our sculptures we find the *aṅgada* type of armlet, which is a circular band, often ornamented with some designs. Unlike an armlet, a bracelet or *kaṅkāna* was seldom worn single. Bracelets as seen in the sculptures, were heavy, and the rings piled one above the other reached more than half-way up the wrist and the arm. Some sculptures wear bangles that look like the modern *khāru*, an ornament worn both by men and women, especially on the wedding day. It is a wide and long ring-like ornament of gold or silver, made in two halves, joined by means of two pins, one pin being the hinge, and the other the fastening. Ornaments of various kinds, like *kundala*, were used for the ears.<sup>186</sup> Anklets were worn on the feet, mainly by women. Big anklets shaped like twisted ropes were known as *nūpura*. The *kiṅkiṇī* type was a chain base fringed with little bells round the feet, on a hollow metal tube filled with shot to make a jingling sound when in motion (*kiṅkiṇī kṣudraghanṭikā*).<sup>187</sup> A forehead ornament (*tilaka* or *lalātikā*) was generally worn by women just below the parting of the hair on the top of the forehead.

An idea of the arrangement of hair and the decoration of the head can be had from the sculptures of the period. But as most of the figures are represented wearing headdresses, it is not possible to give an exhaustive description of the various ways of arranging the hair. The simplest and most common coiffure is seen in illustration 14. This method of arranging hair is still in use, and to swell the chignon women even now put padding or borrowed hair inside it. In a sculpture from the wall of the Kāmākhyā temple, the coiffure is shown raised to the left side. This style differs in no way from the present-day method of dressing hair by the village women of Assam.

185. It is a heart-shaped pendant very graceful in form, and usually tastefully decorated with and elaborate gold wire pattern set in enamel. One side only (that which rests on the bosom) is enamelled, the other being usually set with stones, at the centre of which is a diamond or emerald. At the upper end there is a ring attached to it, by means of which it is threaded together with gold or gold coral beads to form a set.

186. Henniker: *The Gold and Silver Wares of Assam*, Shillong, 1905.

187. *Kiṅkiṇī* was more generally worn by young girls, for in Vanamāla's Grant we have: *Bälakumārikābhīrava kvanat kiṅkiṇibhiḥ*.

## 9. GAMES AND AMUSEMENTS

The commonest children's game, according to the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, was playing with dolls: *pañcālikā-vihārādyaiḥ śisunāṁ kautukaiṣṭathā*.<sup>188</sup> Among the general indoor games, dice seems to have been very popular.<sup>189</sup> *Bhanjā*, a play with sticks was common among the children. Hunting was a favourite pastime. Vallabhadeva's plates mention buffalo hunting and the Doobi plates refer to snaring of deer. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla hints at the method of catching tigers with nets. "Being passionately fond of the chase", says the record, "(Purandarapāla) gave more than once extraordinary proofs of it by the way in which he captured hostile kings, like tigers, in nettings of arrows improvised for the occasion." This practice of catching tigers, deer, and wild pigs by the use of large nets still survives in the province. When a tiger is known to come near to the village, the villagers would surround with nets the tiger's lair usually small patch of jungle in the vicinity of the village, and shouting, yelling and beating drums, drive the animal into the nets, where he falls an easy victim to the spears and bludgeons of the people.<sup>190</sup> Hunting with spears, bows and arrows is, however, a common practice. The catching of wild elephants, specially with a noose is also one of the most exciting as well as one of the most dangerous sports. Assamese elephant-drivers were such great experts in catching these animals that Mirjumla tried very hard to take some of them with him to Delhi but he failed.

The *Deodhāi Asam Burañji* presents an interesting account of the various pastimes of the Āhom monarchs, such as hawk-fights, elephant-fights, buffalo-fights, tiger-bear contests, etc. The Āhom kings maintained regular aviaries for the training of hawks. They were known as *carāi-cong* and there was a well organised *khel* or guild connected with this royal pastime with the usual gradation of officers.<sup>191</sup>

Fishing is chiefly done by means of traps, baskets, and bamboo rods fitted with iron nails. Most of the fishing methods are borrowed from the Austric or Tibeto-Burman speakers. Poisoning the river is another method commonly resorted to by the hill people. For this purpose they use various plants. The poison has the effect of stupefying the fish which float on the surface of the water and can be collected without trouble.

188. Chap. 86, v. 134.

189. *Ibid.* Deodhāl.

190. *Kālikā Purāṇa* Chap. 84.

191. Butler: *A Sketch of Assam*, p. 21.

192. *Asam Burañji* Intro. xv.

Dancing and music were popular amusements. Besides the inscriptional and the literary evidences, there are many sculptural representations of men and women, gods and godlings, in dancing postures, and of musicians playing upon different instruments.<sup>193</sup>

## 10. CONVEYANCES

Conveyances (*yāna*) generally consisted of bullock carts (*sakaṭa*) carriages (*ratha*)<sup>194</sup> drawn by elephants, horses and boats. Litters carried on men's shoulders were called *Śivikā* and *Dolā*. *Kumāra Haranya* gives us a beautiful description of a travelling chariot drawn by four horses. The chariot contained standards and festoons, white and black chowries were fitted on the standard. The horses were decorated on the forehead with gold-mirrors, *ghāgar* on the legs and gold belts on the neck.<sup>195</sup>

Boats of various types were used. Vanamāla's Grant gives a beautiful description of the swift-moving royal boats, adorned with various ornaments, sonorous *kiñkini* (small bells) and *cāmaras*. Besides horses, bullocks and caparisoned elephants were also used for travelling.

## II. EDUCATION AND LEARNING

### 1. GENERAL EDUCATION

It is clear that education in the sense of book-learning was not so widely diffused as it is to-day. The learned class of the day was, of course, the Brāhmaṇas, but the common people were also not wholly illiterate. It is obvious that the Vyavahāris (lawyers), Lekhakas (scribes) and other officials who copied books, made up accounts, and drew up deeds were all educated. Even the copper-smiths and masons, who engraved the epigraphs, must have been able to read and write. From the occurrence of such names as Śani, Dhani, Ani,<sup>196</sup> names usually borne by common people,

193. Fig. 20.

194. Grant of Vanamāla.

195. *cāri ghodd laile teō bhāla bhāla cāi  
kāndhata yuvali dñi yuṣilanta yāi  
Dheaja daṇḍa paṭakāka dīleka sundari  
Śukla kāla cāmara maṇḍilā bhāla kari  
Ghorāra kapālē dīlā suvarṇa dāpani  
Pāvata ghorāra bāje runujunu śuni  
Gale ratna ghantā dīlā dekhite subeśa...*

196. Guākuci Grant. Bhaṭṭasali also remarks that the Gachṭal inscription is the handiwork of some stone mason and not of a good scribe. I.H.Q. XXII, p. 12.

among the engravers of the epigraphs, as well as from the corrupt and colloquial forms of certain words and phrases used, it may be concluded that the engraving was sometimes entrusted to ordinary workmen.

Education was centred round the *guru-gṛha*,<sup>197</sup> schools maintained by private individuals, or at village schools provided by the Brāhmaṇas of an *Agrahāra* village. The Brāhmaṇa donees, the recipients of royal grants, are described as being zealous in discharging their six-fold traditional duties,<sup>198</sup> of which *adhyāpanā* (teaching) was the most important. From references in inscriptions, it is clear that the Brāhmaṇa villages were responsible for the teaching of Sanskrit; here, the Vedas, the systems of philosophy, and various other branches of learning were taught to those in the schools. The great Vaiṣṇavite apostle Śaṅkara Deva received his education at a ḡola or Chātraśālā maintained by the Brāhmaṇa *guru* Mahendra Kandali. This shows that even non-Brāhmaṇas were admitted into these schools along with the Brāhmaṇa students.

The village school sometimes used to be held in the porch of a temple. But, whether used as a school or not, the village shrine was a centre of popular education through the constant recitation and exposition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. Occasionally the priests or the leaders of the religious sects used to expound the principles and philosophy of their own sects in the temple precincts. The temples were also the scene of festive gatherings and communal rejoicings. These festivals took various forms, but they always included music, dancing, recitation, play and pantomime. In this way, the temples played a remarkable part in the cultural life of the people.

The grant of Balavarman refers to the *Samāvartana* ceremony which was performed at the end of the *Brahmacarya* period. The most elaborate ceremonies are prescribed in the various *sūtra* and *smṛti* texts. An auspicious day for the ceremony was selected and the student was required to shut himself up in a room throughout the morning. At midday, he came out, cleansed his mouth, and shaved his head and beard. He then relinquished his girdle (*mekhalā*), deer-skin (*ajina*), etc., the insignia of the students' order. The *guru* then bathed him in fragrant water. The bath was followed by a gift of new clothes, consisting of ornaments, garlands, collyrium, turban, umbrella and shoes, the use of all of which had been taboo to him during the period of studentship. These were now to be formally and officially offered to him by his

197. Grant of Balavarman, V. 31.

198. Supra.

preceptor with the recitation of proper *mantras*. It was expected that the parents or guardians, who were well off, would furnish a double set of the above articles, one for the *guru* and the other for his pupil. A *homa* sacrifice followed and the hope was expressed that the *snātaka* would get plenty of students to teach. The teacher then offered him *madhuparka*. Dressed in his new dress, the student proceeded to the assembly of the learned men of the locality. He was there formally introduced as a competent scholar by his teacher. Returning home, he would bid farewell to his teacher, after paying him such fees as he could afford.<sup>199</sup>

It is obvious that the kings were keenly interested in the spread of learning and education, and made large grants for that purpose. Writing of Bhāskaravarman, the Chinese pilgrim remarks that the king was fond of learning and the people imitated him. "Men of high talents", he wrote, "visited the kingdom".<sup>200</sup> The pilgrim specially mentions the visit of a learned Brāhmaṇa who informed Bhāskaravarman as to "the high qualities of the Master of the Law (Hiuen Tsiang)". This Brāhmaṇa was formerly a heretic of the Lokātiya sect, who came to Nālandā monastery to dispute with the monks. But being defeated in discussion, he was converted by the Chinese pilgrim to Buddhism.<sup>201</sup> The very fact that Bhāskaravarman showed a commendable anxiety to profit by the learned company of the Chinese monk is itself a testimony to the standing of learning in the province.

Learning flourished well in Assam and made it attractive to scholars of other countries. Hiuen Tsiang rightly remarked that 'men of abilities came from far to study here'. This is evident from the visits of such scholars as Śaṅkarācārya (788-820 A.D.), Nānaka (1649-1538 A.D.) and Guru Teg Bāhādur (17th century). Śaṅkarācārya is said to have come to Assam to hold learned discussions with the reputed Śākta teacher Abhinavagupta. The author of the *Rājatarānginī* credits the king of Kāmarūpa, possibly of the 1st century A.D. as being the patron of Buddhist Śrāvakas, for he entertained in his court Stoumpe, a Buddhist Śramana from Loh country or Tibet. As elsewhere, in Assam also, both Brāhmaṇa and non-Brāhmaṇa scholars and teachers used to wander about the country holding debates and disputations with teachers of rival sects. They, thereby, improved the philosophical and classical learning, asserted their influence and increased the number of their adherents. The defeated teacher as in the case of the above-

199. *Education in Ancient India*, pp. 38-42; *History of Dharmashāstra*, II, Pt., pp. 408-415.

200. *Buddhist Records of Western World*, II, p. 196.

201. *The Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, pp. 161-165.

mentioned Brāhmaṇa of the Lokātiya sect, would usually give up his own doctrines and embrace those of the winner. Such was the case with the Vaiṣṇavite guru Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva, who was formerly a Śākta happened to meet Śaṅkaradeva and a controversy ensued between them over the respective merits of Śākta and Vaiṣṇava faiths. Being defeated in the disputation, Mādhava Deva accepted the Vaiṣṇavite faith and acknowledged Śaṅkara as the spiritual guru. Śaṅkaradeva too held disputations at the court of the Koc king Naranārāyaṇa with Brāhmaṇa scholars brought from Banaras and other religious centres of Northern India. The controversy lasted for several days and at last Śaṅkara rose triumphant. Naranārāyaṇa was struck with the profundity of his scholarship and honoured him with valuable presents.

Besides, the kings in their court used to maintain eminent scholars and poets, who were encouraged to compose and compile treatises on various subjects. The two great epics, for instance, were translated into Assamese at the courts of the Kachhāri king Mahāmāṇikya in the thirteenth century and the Koc king Naranārāyaṇa in the sixteenth century. Naranārāyaṇa further entrusted Śaṅkaradeva with the translation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Puruṣottama with the compilation of a Sanskrit grammar, Śridhara with the preparation of a book on Astronomy and Bakula Kāyastha with the translation of *Lilāvatī*, a book on Mathematics.<sup>202</sup> References are available as to the existence of libraries of manuscripts. Manuscripts of well-known Sanskrit texts in large numbers are now being discovered in the Vaiṣṇavite monasteries. This really was a sure sign of intellectual activity of the period. The Ahom kings, in their palaces, set apart a section for the preservation of royal manuscripts, records, letters, despatches, and maps in charge of high officials.<sup>203</sup>

## 2. CURRICULUM OF STUDY

A little information exists as to the curriculum. The epigraphs mention both the cultivation of *vidyā* and *kalā*. The distinction between the two as explained by the texts is that the former is literary study, and the latter is professional activity. Under *vidyā* is included the four *Vedas*, the four *Upavedas*, described as *Āyurveda*, *Dhanurveda*, *Gandharvaveda*, and the *Tantras*,<sup>204</sup> the

202 *Dorang Rājarāmārālī*, Stanzas 604-612.

203 *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*, Intro. xvii-xviii.

204 Tantra as a subject of study is specially referred to in the Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla. V. 16.

six *Vedāngas*, *Itihāsa*, *Purāṇas*, *Smṛti*, *Arthaśāstra*, *Kāmaśāstra*, *Silpaśāstra*, *Alaṅkāra*, *Kāvya*, etc. The Puṣpabhadrā Grant refers to a Brāhmaṇa well-versed in *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, *Mimāṃsā*, and *Cāṇakya* (*Arthaśāstra*).<sup>205</sup> *Kathā-Gurucarita*, an early biography of Śaṅkaradeva mentions that Śaṅkaradeva studied four *Vedas*, fourteen *Śāstras*, eighteen *Purāṇas*, eighteen *Bhāratas*, fourteen *Vyākaraṇas*, eighteen *Kāvyas*, eighteen *Koṣas*, *Samhitās*, *Amara*, *Cāṇakya*, and *Yoga Śāstra*.<sup>206</sup> This list, however, represents the entire traditional curricula rather than specific studies pursued by the young Śaṅkara.

*Jyotiṣa-vedāṅga*, the science which measures time by studying the movements of the planets and the stars, was extensively studied, and the king maintained Daivajñas at his court<sup>207</sup> who were required to make forecasts of coming events, celestial and terrestrial. *Ayurveda*, the science of medicine, was also carefully studied. There was a state medical department with the royal physician at its head. Veterinary science was an important side development of the state medicine. Ralph Fitch who visited the Koe kingdom in the sixteenth century, says. "They have hospitals for sheep, goats, cats, birds, and for all living creatures. When they be old and lame they keep them until they die". Elephantology, that is, the science dealing with the characteristics, diseases, cures and training of elephant was an important study. The Doobi Grant mentions that even the kings assiduously cultivated the science of elephant lore.

A well-known treatise on the ailments peculiar to elephants entitled *Hastiyurveda* or *Gaja Cikitsā* was compiled by a sage known as Pālakāpya "in the region where the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) flows from Himālayas to the sea".<sup>208</sup> This treatise on elephant science is an extensive compilation of 160 chapters, divided into four *sthānas* or sections, namely, *mahāroga* (principal diseases, 18 chapters); *kṣudraroga* (minor diseases, 72 chapters), *salya* (surgery, 34 chapters), and *utara* (therapy, 36 chapters).<sup>209</sup>

The science of music, associated not only with singing and playing on instruments, but also with dramatic performances and dancing, was well cultivated. Hieun Tsiang records the custom of singing and dancing at the court of Bhāskaravarman.

205. K.S., p. 174, V. 14.

206. *Kathā-Gurucarita*, pp. 28-29.

207. Kamauli Grant, V. 8.

208. J.B.O.R.S., Vol. V, Pt. III, p. 311.

209. Published in Ānandāśarma Sanskrit Series, No. 26. An Assamese version was made in 1734 under the order of the Ahom King Śiva Simha. The Assamese manuscript is profusely illustrated. *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*, pp. 65-67.

The early Assamese literature consists mainly of songs and it refers to various *rāgas* such as *ahira*, *ākāśamanḍala*, *barādi*, *belo-vāra*, *bhāṭhiyālī*, *cālani*, *devajini*, *devamohana*, *dhanaśrī*, *guñjari*, *mālaśrī*, *mañjari*, *mārovāra*, *meghamanḍala*, *paṭamañjari*, *rāmagiri*, *śri gaṇḍhakāli*, *śri gāndhāra*, *suhāi*, *vasanta* under which the songs were sung. These songs and *rāgas* themselves prove that both *mārga* and *deśya* music had already advanced on the lines indicated in the *Saṅgīta Śāstras*. Besides, music, playing of musical instruments formed an integral part of rituals in religious worship. It appears that dancing was cultivated and was highly esteemed. Even Śiva was depicted in temple architectures in dancing poses.<sup>210</sup> We have elsewhere alluded to the custom of dancing girls to temple-establishment and to various decorative dancing figures in temples architecture.<sup>211</sup> An interesting manual on dancing, of the same type as Bharata's *Nātyaśāstra*, was compiled under the name *Hasta-muktāvalī*, to serve the peculiar dramatic requirements of the province.<sup>212</sup>

The art of painting was considerably developed. The Nidhanpur Grant refers to portraits hung on walls of the royal palace. The actual remains of early pictures are three drawings on the Guākuci Plates of Indrapāla. The antiquity of painting is attested by early Assamese literature. Harihara Vipra of the 14th century A.D. in the *Babrubāha Parva* refers to paintings on walls. The Vaiṣṇavite movement led by Śaṅkaradeva burst into a new efflorescence in art and painting. Śaṅkaradeva himself painted celestial figures on scenes for popular dramatic performances known as *Cihna-yātrā*. The skill of painters was requisitioned even to decorate manuscripts by sketching appropriate figures. The art was greatly cultivated down to the time of the Ahoms and we have a large number of illuminated manuscripts in early Assamese,<sup>213</sup> specially of the *Gīta-Govinda* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Some of the book illustrations include scenes from the Ahom court life. These illustrations are on *sāci* leaves, and they show the use of red, blue, and yellow colours in a balanced and harmonious way.

210. The Vaiṣṇavite apostle Śaṅkaradeva cultivated *gandharva* *vidyā* and qualified himself as a master musician (*Bara-gāyana*) and dancer. He gave lessons to the disciples on the art of music, dancing, and play (*bhādona*).

211. Women even now take part in religious dances known as *Deodhani*. Notices of Soucery and its Practices in Assam. J.U.G., pp. 47-48.

212. B. K. Barua : A short note on Sri Hastamuktavali, J.A.R.S., Vol. VIII, pp. 71 ff. Jayakanta Mishra thinks Sri Hastamuktāvalī to be work of the Mithila school of music : *A History of Maithili Literature*, I, p. 34-35.

213. Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, Intro. xvii-xviii.

### 3. WRITING MATERIALS

The *Yoginī Tantra* refers to writing and engraving of letters on materials such as earth, bark, leaves, gold, copper and silver.<sup>214</sup> The clay seals of Bhūskaravarman found at Nālandā prove that letters were written on clay. Copper plates were largely used to record royal decrees and grants. Most of the early manuscripts of Assam were written on the strips of bark of the sāci tree (*Aquilaria Agallocha*). Books written on such barks were brought to Harṣa by Hāṃsavega as presents from Bhāskaravarman. The process of preparing writing materials from bark was not very different as found in the Ahom period. The details of the process of preparing sāci-pāt in the Ahom period have been given by Gait in an appendix to his *History of Assam* in the following words. "A tree is selected of about 15 or 16 years' growth and 30 to 35 inches in girth, measured about 4 feet from the ground. From this the bark is removed in strips, from 6 to 18 feet long, and from 3 to 27 inches in breadth. These strips are rolled up separately with the inner or white part of the bark outwards, and the outer or green part inside, and are dried in the sun for several days. They are then rubbed by hand on a board; or some other hard substance, so as to facilitate the removal of the outer or scaly portion of the bark. After this, they are exposed to the dew for one night. Next morning the outer layer of the bark (*nikari*) is carefully removed and the bark proper is cut into pieces of a convenient size, 9 to 27 inches long and 3 to 18 inches broad. These are put into cold water for about an hour, and the alkali is extracted, after which the surface is scraped smooth with a knife. They are then dried in the sun for half an hour, and, when perfectly dry, are rubbed with a piece of burnt brick. A paste prepared from māṭimāh (*Phascolus radiatus*) is next rubbed in, and the bark is dyed yellow by means of yellow arsenic. This is followed again by sub-dying, after which the strips are rubbed as smooth as marble. The process is now complete, and the strips are ready for use".<sup>215</sup>

Writing pens and holders were made of bamboo, reed, copper, bell-metal, gold and iron.<sup>216</sup> The holders were long and usually measured a cubit in length. The ink was made from peculiar ingredients such as Silikhā (*Terminalia Cibrina*) and the urine of bulls. The chief characteristics of Assamese ink was its tenacity to glossy and slippery surface. In earlier literature, references to

214. II/VII-14-18.

215. p. 375.

216. *Yoginī Tantra*, II/VII-V-VIX.

the use of invisible ink specially in love-letters and diplomatic documents was often met with. The king of Cooch-Behar once sent to the Ahom monarch Khorā Rajā (1552-1611 A.D.) an epistle written in invisible ink, which baffled the ingenuity of the Ahom court, till an abstruse mathematician deciphered the document by reading it in darkness where the letters appeared in their unexpected brightness as they were written with the sap of earth-worm.<sup>217</sup>

#### 4. SANSKRIT LITERATURE

Several passages in our inscriptions indicate that the Kāmarūpa kings took a personal interest in Sanskrit literature. In the Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla, his father, Purandarapāla, is described as *sn-kavi*.<sup>218</sup> King Dharmapāla was also a poet of considerable merit. It is said in the epigraph that in his speech resided Bhagavatī and Sarasvatī, and he was regarded as *Kavicakravālacūḍāmaṇi*, chief of the circle of poets.<sup>219</sup> He is said to have composed the first eight verses of his Puṣpabhadrā Grant. The anthology of *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* contains ten verses by one named Dharmapāla, who, according to N. N. Dasgupta, is none but the king Dharmapāla of Kāmarūpa.<sup>220</sup>

The literary activity of the period further becomes clear from the highly ornate and poetic *praśastis* of the epigraphs. Many of these *praśastis* may be classed among the best specimens of the literature of the period. The stately diction, the easy flow of the verse, and the animated narration of historical incidents put them into a class of secular literature by themselves. The various metres used in them are handled with very great skill. From a study of these *praśastis*, it appears that their composers were not only well acquainted with the classical authors but also greatly influenced by the classical *kāvya* style. This is evinced by their adoption of many passages from the works of Kālidāsa, Bāṇabhaṭṭa and others. As an instance, the passages from the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa are found in the Nowgong Grant of Balavarman.<sup>221</sup>

217. *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*. Intro. xvi-xvii.

218. V. 11.

219. V. 8.

220. King Dharmapāla of Kāmarūpa as Poet. J.A.R.S., IV, pp. 56-57. It is also to be noted that Dharmapāla's records mention the name of two court poets, namely Prasthāna Kalasa and Aniruddha.

221. These plagiarisms were first discovered and published by Mm. Dhireswara Bhattacharya. See also J.A.S.B., 66, Pt. I, pp. 288-289.

The author of the Bargāon Grant seems to imitate the ornate prose style of Bāna. The fact that about one half of the royal genealogy in the Bargāon Grant is in prose, led Hoernle to remark that "the writer's literary powers were not equal to the task of versifying the whole". Hoernle however, seems to forget the fact that the composer here is only resorting to a well-known Sanskrit literary form known as 'campū', a form where verse is combined with rhetorical prose.

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* is a notable literary work of the time. In main though the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is of the nature of a ritualistic manual prescribing various rites and procedures of worship, it also gives valuable information regarding the religious condition prevailing in mediaeval Assam. The *Yoginī Tantra* and *Haragaurī-saṃvāda* are no doubt of later compilations; but they preserve many earlier traditions and as such they are worthy of mention as important semi-historical texts.

### 5. ASSAMESE LITERATURE

Assamese is a branch of the New Indo-Aryan speech and it was developed into a distinct language out of the Eastern Māgadhi Prākṛta. In point of antiquity Assamese had the honour of being noticed by Hieun Tsiang when he visited Kāmarūpa in the 7th Century A.D. He perhaps referred to some individuality of the Kāmarūpa (early Assamese) language when he spoke of it as "slightly differing" from that of mid-India.<sup>222</sup> Earliest specimens of the language are preserved in the songs of *Baudhā Gān O Dohā*, compositions on the esoteric doctrines and Yogic practices of the Sahajiyā school of the Buddhists (compiled between 8th to 10th century A.D.). As pointed out by Dr. G. Tucci on the authority of some Tibetan manuscripts, at least one of the composers of these songs, namely Minanātha, a fisherman, hailed from Kāmarūpa. Other literary productions of the period were the unwritten songs and ballads. The popular songs were those connected with the episode of Behulā, Lakhindār and the worship of Manasā, the snake goddess.

Literature worth the name, however, came to be produced in Assamese towards the beginning of the 13th Century A.D. in the court of Durlabhanārāyaṇa of Kamatāpura. This account is narrated elsewhere.<sup>223</sup>

222. *Kalikā Purāṇa* is a compilation of the time of Dharmapāla of Kāmarūpa, I.H.Q., vol. xxiii, No. 4, p. 322.

223. *Assamese Literature* (P.E.N.)

## CHAPTER VI

## RELIGION

1. *Introduction of Brāhmaṇical Creeds*

It has been stated in the introductory chapter that the province finds no mention in any of the early Vedic texts. The country was first referred to in the Epics, and in this connection the story of Amūrtarajas in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is very significant as it seems to refer to the Aryanisation of the country by a prince of Madhyadeśa. No less important is the account of the Videha Prince Naraka who established himself as the king and conqueror of Kāmarūpa. In the Epics and the Purāṇas, the country is said to have been originally inhabited by *Mlecchas* and *Kirātas*, who were driven by Naraka to the hills and the marshy region near the sea (*vidrāvitāḥ kirātāste sāgarāntam samāśritāḥ*; *satvān kirātān pūrcasyām sāgarānte nyavesayat*).<sup>1</sup> Naraka is further said to have established in his kingdom a large number of learned Brāhmaṇas, well versed in the *Vedas*: *tasmāt kirātānuṣāryya vedaśastrātigān bahūn dvijātīn vāsayāmāsa tatra varṇān sanātanān*.<sup>2</sup> The *Haragaurī-saṃvāda* alludes to Bhagadatta who would bring a hundred Brāhmaṇas from Kanauj for performance of the Vedic sacrifices: *śata-viprān samāniya kānyakubjādi-deśataḥ yajna-karmma svayam kurvan sva-prajāḥ pālayiṣṭati*.<sup>3</sup>

The inscriptions also, as noted previously, (Chapter V) contain references to immigration of Brāhmaṇas to Assam from Madhyadeśa (Middle Country), as well as emigration of Assamese Brāhmaṇas to other provinces. The system of settling Brāhmaṇas in Assam was continued right up to the Ahom period. The incomplete set of Nidhanpur copper-plates alone bear the names of no less than two hundred and five Brāhmaṇas of various *gotras* and *Vedas*, to whose families King Bhūtivarman (600 A.D.) granted land in the Mayūraśālmala *Agrahāra*. Such Brāhmaṇa settlers doubtless spread the Vedic culture in the province; and with the support of the kings, the movement received a great impetus from the 4th century A.D. The process by which Vedic culture was introduced into the country and by which the non-Aryan tribes

1. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Chap. 38, V. 112, V. 121

2. *Ibid.*, v. 124.

3. *I.H.Q.*, Op. Cit.

were converted to Hinduism was probably the same as that which we find adopted by the Brāhmaṇas of the subsequent periods. Thus, the Koc kings (1500 A.D.) who were without doubt of non-Aryan descent, had been recognised by the Brāhmaṇas as sprung from Śiva, the god having taken the form of one of their ancestors and visited the queen, who was herself none other than an incarnation of his divine spouse Pārvatī. The Kachāri kings were similarly converted, and after their ancestry had been satisfactorily traced back to Bhīma, one of the Pāṇḍava princes of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, for the Ahoms, Indra was selected as the progenitor of their kings.<sup>5</sup>

With the contact with the non-Aryan peoples, the Vedic religion underwent radical changes, mainly in two ways: first in the creation, chiefly illustrated by the Epics and Purāṇic literature of a gallery deified personages; secondly, in the adoption of deities, religious myths, and cults derived from the races beyond the Brāhmaṇic pale. Some of these gods and goddesses developed into special cults along sectarian lines. We will in the following pages briefly indicate the main outline of the development of some of the important cults associated with gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu and Sūrya.

## 2. (i) Śaivism

Śaivism, or at least, the worship of Śiva prevailed in Assam from a remote period and it was the popular form of religion both amongst the aborigines and the Aryanized people. An analysis of the names of the sacred places of Assam as given in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, clearly shows that the number of sacred places connected with Śiva worship is larger than that of places associated with Viṣṇu or Devī worship.<sup>6</sup> Rai Bahadur Gunabhiram Barua in his *Āsāni Burañji* (1900) states that Śiva-worship was first introduced in early Assam by Jalpeśvara,<sup>7</sup> a King of north Bengal (Jalpaiguri) which was formerly included in the kingdom of Kāmarūpa. The same king is said to have founded the temple of Jalpeśvara at Jalpaiguri. The *Skanda Purāṇa* narrates the story how the king Jalpa came to be a Śiva-worshipper.<sup>8</sup> The *Kālikā Purāṇa* relates that before the coming of Naraka, who probably introduced the

4. *Census Report of Assam, 1892*, p. 83 : Gait, pp. 48-49.

5. *Yoginī Tantra*, 1/XIV.

6. Number of places associated with Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Devī are respectively fifteen, four and five.

7. pp. 39, 45-46.

8. *Āvanya Khaṇḍa*, Chap. 66.

cult of the mother goddess into Kāmarūpa, Śiva was regarded as the guardian deity of the province.<sup>8a</sup> Further it records that the kingdom of Kāmarūpa was formerly preserved by Śambhū for his own domain—*Sa ca deśaḥ svarājyārthe pūrvamī guptaśca śambhūnā*. Śaivism, however, did not entirely disappear from the country during the reign of Naraka; Śiva was then privately worshipped (*Śambhūrantarguptaḥ sa me pure*) by the earlier inhabitants of the country. Kakati considers that Śaivism in some gross form with wine and flesh was the prevailing religion of the aboriginal Kirātas.<sup>9</sup> The Aryanized conquerors, therefore, held the religion in disdain and placed it under a ban. Śaivism, on the other hand, enjoyed so much popularity that no sooner Naraka was deposed Śaivism again came into prominence.

The inscriptions contain definite references to the worship of Śiva. The Grant of Vanamāla, while recording the incident of Kṛṣṇa's bestowal of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa on Bhagadatta, states that Bhagadatta worshipped Śiva with great humility and penances.<sup>10</sup> His successor, Brajadatta was devoted to Śiva.<sup>11</sup> In the initial verse of the Nidhanpur Grant, Bhāskaravarman invokes Śiva, who has the crescent on his crown, who is the holder of the *piṇāka*, and who is besmeared with ashes. The Kamauli Grant records that "Śiva was propitiated by the Brāhmaṇa Śridhara through penances of eating once either by day or by night, and living on alms without begging, and fastings".<sup>12</sup> The *Harṣacarita* mentions that Bhāskaravarman from his childhood firmly resolved "never to do homage to any being except the lotus feet of Śiva".<sup>13</sup> The pre-eminence of Śiva worship is clearly indicated by the *prāśastis* found in many of the copper-plates of the period. Besides, the kings in these records described themselves as *Parama Vārāha* and *Parama Māheśvara*, which clearly illustrate that they were unquestionably great champions of Śiva.

Some of these *prāśastis* commence with a distinct Śaivite symbol—S, called Āñji. According to Bhattacharya, this sign is the form of the snakeshaped *kulakundalī* that resides in *sūṣumṇā*.<sup>14</sup> This *kulakundalī* is the Śakti or Śiva that remains

8a. Chap. XXXVIII, V. 96.

9. *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*, p. 17.

10. V. 5.

11. *Ibid.* V. 8.

12. V. 20.

13. Cowel, p. 217.

14. Bhattacharya: *Mahādeva, the Istadevatā of the kings of Kāmarūpa*, J.A.R.S., II, pp. 1-6.

coiling round the *svayambhū* (self-begotten) *liniga* at *mūlādhāra* (the lower nervous system of Indian anatomy).

That the Śaivism of the period was a fully developed religion with various sub-cults can be seen from the various names by which Śiva is invoked in the *praśastis*. He is invoked as *Parameśvara*<sup>15</sup> (the supreme lord), *Māheśvara*<sup>16</sup> (the great lord), *Īśvara*<sup>17</sup> (the lord), *Mahāvarāha*<sup>18</sup> (the great Boar), *Ādideva*<sup>19</sup> (the first god); all these names denote Śiva's position of supremacy over all other gods. His beneficent nature is indicated by the names of *Sambhū*<sup>20</sup> (the benign one), *Śaikara*<sup>21</sup> (the beneficent), and *Prajādhinātīha*<sup>22</sup> (lord of the people). *Rudra*<sup>23</sup> is his name which signifies his destructive or fierce character. The names *Hāṭakaśūlin*,<sup>24</sup> *Hara*,<sup>25</sup> *Kāmeśvara*,<sup>26</sup> *Kitara*,<sup>27</sup> *Ardha-yuvatīśvara*,<sup>28</sup> *Pasupati*,<sup>29</sup> *Gauripati*,<sup>30</sup> *Somanātha*<sup>31</sup> are connected with various Śiva myths. In the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra* Śiva however, appears more as a *Bhairava* than as a normal god.

These various names attributed to Śiva alone convey a fair idea of the popular conception of the god. But fortunately the *praśastis* contain further details of the cult of the god prevalent at the time. Śiva is referred to as the prime deity (*Ādideva*) and the great god (*Parama Māheśvara*) whose feet were worshipped "by the chiefs of deities bowed down in devotion".<sup>32</sup> In the *praśasti* of the Bargāon Grant, he is invoked as the supreme self, who "becomes many through his multifarious attributes due to omnipresence, and thus shines in the world".<sup>33</sup>

But Śiva is not conceived in the abstract alone. As has been said, he appears as a concrete divine figure with familiar myths

15. Nidhanpur Grant.

16. Grant of Balavarman.

17. Grant of Vanamāla.

18. Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.

19. Śubhaṇkarapāṭaka Grant.

20. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

21. Bargāon Grant.

22. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

23. Grant of Balavarman.

24. Grant of Vanamāla.

25. Bargāon Grant.

26. Grant of Vanamāla; Guākuci Grant of Indrapāla.

27. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

28. Śubhaṇkarapāṭaka, and Khonāmukhi Grant.

29. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

30. Vallabhadeva's Plates.

31. Kamauli Grant, v. 26.

32. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 24.

33. v. 1.

C. 19

and legends clustering round him. In the Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla, in the opening verse, there is a reference to Śiva and Gaurī in a very amusing way. It says, "The club, axe, bull crescent and the rest, everything that is your own, O Kitava (gambler) has been won to-day by me (but) given back to you : only let Gaṅgā remain as my water-bearer"; at this speech of Gaurī, "the bent down head of Śambhū, (who was) vanquished in a seat of gambling, be victorious". Both in the Śubhāñkarapāṭaka and Khonāmukhi Grants, he is conceived of as having half his form as woman (*ardha-yuvarāshvara*) and "having on (one side of) the neck a blue lotus, (on the other side) a jewelled hood of serpent attached; (on one side) a lofty breast painted with saffron, (the other side) besmeared with ashes ; who thus appears as it were an amalgamated creation of the amorous and the dreadful sentiments". The Nidhanpur Grant alludes to his overcoming Kāma (Cupid) by mere sight.<sup>34</sup> He is further described in the records as having his usual weapons *khatrāṅga*, *paraśu*, *piṇāka* and *sūla*. His vehicle is the bull, *śasikalā* shines on his forehead.<sup>35</sup> and he has a girdle of the lord of snakes.<sup>36</sup> He resides on the peak of the mountain Kailāsa.<sup>37</sup> He is the lord of Gaurī, having the Ganges on his head.<sup>38</sup>

Śiva was also worshipped in the *liṅga* form. Although iconographic representations of Śiva in his various forms are discovered in Assam, it appears that he was chiefly worshipped in the form of *liṅgam*, an upright pillar or rod of stone erected on a pedestal called *yoni*. The *Yoginī Tantra* states that the number of *liṅgam* in Kāmarūpa exceeds a million.<sup>39</sup>

Besides, there were and even now are various tribal modes of worship of Śiva. In the dynastic history of the Koc kings of Cooch Behar, it is narrated that on the eve of his expedition against the Āhoms, King Naranārāyaṇa offered worship to Śiva according to accepted Śāstrik rites. Thereupon there was an insistence by his Kachāri soldiers that Śiva should also be worshipped according to their tribal customs. This was allowed and the worship was carried out by the sacrifice of swine, buffaloes, he-goats, pigeons, ducks and cocks and by the offering of rice and liquor and the dancing of women (*deo-dhāi*). This tribal mode of worship was recognised and legalized by the king by the issue of an edict which set aside

34. V. 2.

35. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapālī.

36. Nidhanpur Grant.

37. Bargāon Grant.

38. *Ibid*; Grant of Vanamālā.

39. *Kottilīgāsāmākīrnā kāmākhya kalparavallī*, Bk. I, Chap. XI, V. 36.

the north bank of the Brahmaputra river for the practice of aboriginal forms of worship. A curious practice of animal sacrifice is in vogue even now in the Śiva temples of Assam. On the occasion of the Śiva Caturdasi festival, castrated goats are strangled to death in the precincts of the temples. Their flesh is cooked and a huge feast is held at night in the temples.

The inscriptions refer also to temples dedicated to Śiva. The Grant of Vanamāla states that "by the king was borne the burden of Nahuṣa, by reverentially reconstructing anew the temple that had fallen down in course of time, of the trident-holder Hāṭaka-Śiva ..... (making it) high like the summit of the Himālayas, and endowed with incomparable (numbers of) villages, people, elephants and prostitutes".<sup>40</sup> Hieun Tsiang, also records that during his visit to Kāmarūpa, there were hundreds of deva-temples, many of which were probably dedicated to Śiva.<sup>41</sup> The ruins of a Saiva temple, dating from 600 A.D. resembling the Gupta temples at Bhumra, Nachna-Kuthara and Deogarh, have been unearthed at Tezpur.<sup>42</sup>

### (ii) Śāktism<sup>43</sup>

The Devī Purāṇa, a work composed about the end of the seventh or the beginning of the 8th Century A.D., states that the Devī was worshipped in her different forms in different places, for instance in Kāmarūpa, Kāmākhyā, Bhoṭṭadeśa, etc.<sup>44</sup> Wilson, in the preface to his translation of Viṣṇu Purāṇa, remarks that Assam, or at least the north-east of Bengal (Kāmarūpa), seems to have been the source from which the Tāntric and Śākta corruption of the religion of the Vedas and the Purāṇas proceeded. "Śāktism", says Eliot, "in the sense of a definite sect with scriptures of its own, if not confined to the north-east corner, at least has its headquarters there".<sup>45</sup> Traditionally the Śākta cult is considered to

40. V. 24 Vallabhadeva's Plates refer to a temple of Mahādeva, V. 13.

41. Watters, II, p. 126.

42. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, pp. 32 ff. R. D. Bannerji: *Imperial History of the Guptas*, pp. 194 ff. On the bank of the river Brahmaputra, near Dhenukhana Hill, are the ruins of two Śiva temples, which Dikshit considers to be contemporary with the date of Harjjara's Tezpur Inscription (829 A.D.), A.R.A.S.J. Bengal Circle 1820-21, p. 36.

43. Śāktism, according to some scholars, originated from various non-Aryan cults. For this view see Chanda: *Indo-Aryan Races*, pp. 122-161; Payne: *The Śāktas*, pp. 61-74; E.R.E., VI, pp. 705 ff.

44. Chap. 39, v. 14 and Chap. 42, v. 9.

45. Hinduism in Assam, J.R.A.S., 1920, p. 1153.

have its centre in Kāmarūpa with its chief temple at Kāmakhyā.<sup>46</sup> But strangely enough, in the inscriptions there is no trace of Sākti worship, except the veiled references in the inscriptions of Vanamāla and Indrapāla to the temples of Kāmeśvara Mahā-gaurī, and Mahā-gaurī Kāmeśvara. The silence may, however, be explained by the fact that Sāktism represents a particular phase of religion which was in the main personal and esoteric. Consequently it had no connection with any public religious order or establishment. Personal in origin, its tenets and history were preserved in a special class of magical and sacramental literature, commonly known as Tantras.

Throughout the mediaeval period, even down to the 18th century, the leading religion of Assam, however seems to be Sāktism.<sup>47</sup> Kāmākhyā is the most holy and famous shrine of the sect, and with its worship was associated the various rites, mantras, mudrās and sacrifices.<sup>48</sup>

The name of the hillock where the shrine stands in Nilācala (blue mountain). According to the Kālikā Purāṇa the genital organ of Sati fell here when her dead body was carried hither and thither in frantic sorrow by her husband Śiva. The mountain represented the body of Śiva himself and when Sati's genital organ fell on it, the mountain turned blue. The goddess herself is called Kāmākhyā, because she came there secretly to satisfy her amour (Kāma) with Śiva. Dr. Kakati believes that this Yoni-goddess of Kāmākhyā migrated into Assam with the migration of the Austric peoples. When Naraka founded a kingdom in early Assam he established himself as the custodian of this Yoni-goddess and made her the presiding deity of the state. Later religious history of Assam also centres round her and other goddesses recognized as her varied manifestations. After Naraka's death, Kāmākhyā was

46. Kāmākhyā seems to be a new name of the goddess and she does not appear in the early literature. Kakati gives evidence for thinking that the word is non-Sanskritic in origin. He has equated the word with some similar Austric formations, which mean ghost or dead body. He further suggests that Kāmākhyā was formerly, a goddess of ghosts and spirits, who was worshipped in a *smārāna* or cremation ground. *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, pp. 53 ff. About the importance of the temple of Kāmākhyā, see Eliot : *Hinduism and Buddhism*, II, pp. 288-290.

47. For Sāktism in medieval Assam, see *Census Reports*, Assam, 1891, I, p. 80; and 1901, i. 39 ff.; Eliott : *Hinduism in Assam*, J.R.A.S. 1904, pp. 1155-1186.

48. The Blood-Chapter or *Rudhiriddhyāya* of the Kālikā Purāṇa gives detailed instructions of the sacrifices. Translation of the Chapter is in the *Asiatic Researches*, V. 1797, pp. 371 ff. For human sacrifices in Assam See E.R.E., VI, pp. 849 ff. Blockman : *Geography and History of Bengal*, J.A.S.B. XLII, pp. 240 ff.

no longer the primordial Mother Goddess but became the amorous wife Pārvatī living in inseparable companionship with her husband Śiva for secret love. Thus a new motif came into play and fresh conceptions have been ascribed to the goddess. The wife-goddess Pārvatī in time was again assimilated to a virgin goddess of beauty and sex, Tripurā, and a considerable section of the Kālikā Purāṇa has been devoted to the exposition of the rites of her worship. The cult of virgin worship, and of the sexual aspect of the Devī worship seems to be derived from the cult of Tripurā.<sup>49</sup>

There seems to have developed a dreadful conception of the goddess. In this form she was popularly known as Kēcāī-khāī (eater of the raw flesh) because of the annual human sacrifice at her temple. Her temple was at Sadiya and was called Tāmreśvarī Devī (the goddess of the copper temple). Dr. Kakati considers that she is the same goddess as Dikkaravāsini whom Kālikā Purāṇa describes as the presiding deity of north-eastern Assam. The goddess Dikkaravāsini has two forms Tikṣṇa-kāntā (dreadfully attractive) and Lalita-kāntā (gracefully attractive). Tikṣṇa-kāntā is black, pot-bellied and with one lock of matted hair (*Eka-jatā*). She is also called Ugratārā. Her attendants are Bhagā, Subhagā, Cāmuṇḍā, Karālā, Bhiṣanā, Vikalā,— all dreadful names. She is to be worshipped in general like goddess Kāmakhya, but her most delectable offerings consisted of strong spirituous liquor, human sacrifice, *modaka*, flesh, curry, cocoanuts and sugarcane. From her epithets Ugratārā, Ekajatā, she seems to have been of Buddhist origin. There is another Ugratārā or Ekajatā temple at Gauhati. These Buddhist goddesses were later received into Hindu Tantras and taken as manifestations of Durgā or Kāli. "Tārā is the same as Kāli", says the *Yoginī Tantra*, "the embodiment of supreme love. So also is Kāmakhya". In this way, all local and independent deities such as Umiā, Kāli, Karālā, Cāmuṇḍā came to be regarded as manifestations of Kāmakhya or Durgā in different circumstances.<sup>50</sup>

### 3. Vaiṣṇavism

The worship of Viṣṇu was evidently prevalent in Assam from early times, for as has been said before, the king of Kāmarūpa traced their lineage to Viṣṇu through Naraka.<sup>51</sup> Bāṇa in his

49. *The Mother Goddess Kāmakhya*, Chap. IV, pp. 35-70.

50. *Ibid.*

51. It is interesting to note here that in the Sānti Parva of the *Mahābhārata* Viṣṇu is called Prāgyotiṣa-Jyeṣṭha.

*Harṣacarita* describes Bhāskaravarman as a descendant of the Vaiṣṇava family (*vaiṣṇavavāṇīśch*).<sup>52</sup> The earliest recorded reference to the worship of Viṣṇu in Kāmarūpa occurs in the Baḍa-gaṅgā Rock inscription (554 A.D.).<sup>53</sup> It hails King Bhūtivarman as *Parama-deivata Parama-Bhāgarata*. It appears, however, that during the subsequent centuries Vaiṣṇavism occupied only a subordinate position. It again, with state support, came into prominence during the time of Dharmapāla (1200 A.D.) For, unlike the other epigraphs, the *prāśasti* in the Pūṣpabhadrā Grant of Dharmapāla begins with an adoration of the Boar-incarnation of Viṣṇu : and in the record itself the donee is referred to as a Brāhmaṇa, who was "from his birth a worshipper of the lotus-like feet of Mādhava": *yo bālyataḥ prabhṛtimādhavapādapaṭmapūjā-prapañcā-racanam sucirāṇi calcāra*.<sup>54</sup> This epigraph is doubly significant as the king himself composed its *prāśasti*. Bhattacharya is therefore right in suggesting that Dharmapāla, at the time of issuing this grant, embraced the Vaiṣṇava faith.<sup>55</sup>

The adoption of Viṣṇu's name as a personal name became common during this time. In the Grant of Balavarman, Vanamāla is referred to as devoted to the faith of Bhava (Śiva), but his name Vanamāla, an epithet of Viṣṇu, indicates his devotion to that god. If personal names are any guide to the common deities of popular worship, as seems very likely from what we know of the custom prevailing to-day, the names of persons we find in these records are significant. From the occurrences of such personal names of Brāhmaṇas as Saṃkarṣaṇa, Mādhava, Govardhana, Gopāla, Sudarśana, Keśava, Janārddana, etc.<sup>56</sup> it may be safely inferred that whatever deities might have been evoked on special occasions, these deities reigned supreme in the daily life of the people ; and the legends and mythology associated with these names were well-known. Moreover, of the thousand names of Viṣṇu, some at least became very popular. They are *Acyuta*<sup>57</sup> (unfallen, imperishable), *Nārāyaṇa*<sup>58</sup> (who moves in the water), *Puruṣottama*<sup>59</sup> (the highest of men, the supreme spirit), *Hari*,<sup>60</sup> *Upendra*,<sup>61</sup> *Vāsudeva*, *Kṛṣṇa*.<sup>62</sup>

52. *Op. Cit.*

53. *Op. Cit.*

54. v. 18.

55. *K.S.*, p. 170.

56. Nidhanpur Grant.

57. Guākuci Grant.

58. Nidhanpur Grant.

59. Guākuci Grant.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Grant of Balavarman.

62. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 4.

But for want of sufficient materials, it is now difficult to define the nature of early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. It is, however, certain that it corresponded to the Bhāgavatism of the Gupta period, which was a syncretism of various cults of Viṣṇu, namely, Viṣṇu of Vedic Brāhmaṇism, Nārāyaṇa of the Pāñcarāṭras, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva of the Sātvats, Gopāla of the Ābhīra tribe of shepherds.

The worship of *avatāra* or incarnation is, of course, a notable feature of Vaiṣṇavism of this period.<sup>63</sup> The extent of epigraphic evidence shows that the *avatāra* theory was current in Assam. The inscriptions of Vanamāla, Balavarainan, Ratnapāla, Indrapāla and Dharmapāla mention the Boar-incarnation in which Viṣṇu "lifted up the earth from the depths of the lower region". The Kamauli Grant begins with an invocation of Hari in the form of Varāha.<sup>64</sup> The *Kālikā Purūṇa* notices that Viṣṇu as the Boar incarnation was worshipped in the Citravaha mountain east of Pāṇḍu. Other *avatāras* which we come across in these epigraphs, are Jāmadagnya Rāma, "who washed his blood-stained axe in the water of the Lauhitya",<sup>65</sup> Narasimha and Rāma<sup>66</sup> who "crossing the ocean killed Rāvana."<sup>67</sup> The most important *aratāra* in the later Vaiṣṇava cult of the province is Kṛṣṇa, whose account became the main theme of early Assamese literature. The Kṛṣṇa-legend seems to have formed an essential element of Vaiṣṇavism in Kāmarūpa as early at least as the 7th Century A.D. References have been made to Kṛṣṇa's sportive childhood as Gopāla, who though born of Devakī was brought up by Yaśodā,<sup>68</sup> and was the delight of the Gopis,<sup>69</sup> (*gopījanānanditamānasā*).

Another *avatāra* of Viṣṇu is Hayagrīva (Viṣṇu with horse-head). Under this name, he is especially worshipped in Assam even to-day<sup>70</sup> in the Hayagrīva Mādhava temple<sup>71</sup> at Hajo, a place fourteen miles north-west of Gauhati. As regards the origin of this *avatāra* the *Mahābhārata*<sup>72</sup> relates that at one time, while Viṣṇu was sleeping and Brahmā was on the lotus, issued out

63. Roy Choudhury: *Early History of the Vaisnava Sect*, p. 104.

64. *Op. Cit.*

65. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

66. Guākuci Grant.

67. Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla, v. 9; Kamauli Grant, v. 4.

68. Guākuci Grant, v. 24.

69. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 13.

70. Ghosh: *Hayagrīva worship in Assam*, *J.A.R.S.*, V, pp. 79-85.

71. The antiquity of this temple is assumed from its reference in the *Kālikā Purūṇa*, Chap. 76 ff. According to Dr. Bloch, it is one of the existing pre-Āhom Temples in Assam: *A.R.A.S. Bengal Circle 1903*, p. 18.

72. *Sānti Parva*, Chap. 349.

of the navel of Viṣṇu, two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who took away the *Vedas* from Brahmā, went to Rasātala. Brahmā, being much aggrieved at this, awoke Viṣṇu, and prayed for the recovery of the *Vedas*. Viṣṇu assumed the Hayagrīva form and recovered the *Vedas* and gave them to Brahmā. He then went to sleep in the north-east corner of the great sea in his Hayagrīva form. The demons came to him and invited him to fight, in which they were killed. According to other accounts, it was the Asura Hayagrīva who stole away the *Vedas*, which were subsequently recovered by Viṣṇu. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>73</sup> the Hayagrīva avatāra of Viṣṇu preceded the Matsya; when the worlds were burnt down, Viṣṇu in the form of a horse re-compiled the four *Vedas*, *Vedāṅgas*, etc. The *Devi Bhāgavata* and the *Skanda Purāṇa* in its Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa, however, allude to two different accounts on the origin of the Hayagrīva form of Viṣṇu. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* records that Viṣṇu in the form of Hayagrīva killed the Fever-Demon (*Jvarāsura*) in the Maṇikūṭa hill and lived there for the benefit of men, gods and *asuras*. Afflicted with fever and killing the Fever-Demon, Viṣṇu took a recovery bath and a tank was formed in the place, called Apunarbhava, because whosoever bathed there suffered no second birth. There is another reference to the killing of a demon named Hayagrīva near about Viśvanātha, the Lord of the world (*Jagatpatih*) fought with Hayagrīva and after having killed him migrated to Maṇikūṭa.<sup>73a</sup>

Further, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* mentions the manifestations of Viṣṇu as the First Incarnation and worshipped in the Matsyadvaja mountain east of Maṇikūṭa; Mādhava in the form of a Bhairava named Pāṇḍunātha, and Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu who was worshipped in the Dikkaravāsinī region. The mode of worship of Vāsudeva as propounded in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* corresponds very much to the directions laid down in the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās.<sup>73b</sup> A stray copper plate grant of the śaka year 1314 refers to the Satyanārāyaṇa form of worship of Viṣṇu.<sup>73c</sup> Another remarkable feature of Vaishnavism of the period is the enthronement of Lakṣmī besides Nārāyaṇa as the centre of Viṣṇu worship. The perpetual abode of Lakṣmī is the bosom of Nārāyaṇa.<sup>74</sup> She is the goddess of wealth and splendour. She is praised in the record as Lakṣmī Śrī and Kamala-

73. Chap. 53.

73a. *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*, p. 71-72.

73b. *Ibid.*, p. 74-75.

73c. *J.A.R.S.*, Vol. III, p. 41.

74. Nidhanpur Grant: Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla.

nivāśinī.<sup>75</sup> The Śubhañkarapāṭaka Grant alludes to the quarrel between Kamalā and Bhārati, a story so common in Hindu folk-tradition.<sup>76</sup>

That Vaiṣṇavism prospered fairly well from the 7th century onwards can also be learnt from the sculptural representations discovered in the province. K. N. Dikshit has drawn our attention to an inscribed Viṣṇu image of the 9th century A.D. The inscription, though greatly mutilated, refers to the setting up of this stone image of divine Nārāyaṇa: *bhagavato nārāyaṇa(sya) śaili pratimā bhattyantam (bhaktānām).*<sup>77</sup> The same authority has proved the existence of a fairly large Viṣṇu temple, dating approximately from the 10th or 11th century A.D., on the evidence of images and sculptural fragments collected from ruins in the neighbourhood of the Sibsagar town. The Varāha Purāṇa mentions that in the Himalayas was a temple of Kokāmukhasvāmin, the favourite residence of Viṣṇu, and it contained his best image. According to the Brahma Purāṇa, Narakāsura, who sprang from the union of Viṣṇu in his Boar form with the goddess Mahī or Chāyā, and was made lord of the city of Prāgjyotiṣa by his divine father, was born in the Kokāmukhātīrtha in the Himalayas.<sup>78</sup> The reference to the Kausīki and Trisrotā rivers as being in its neighbourhood puts the site within the ancient boundary of Kāmarūpa.<sup>79</sup>

#### 4. Other sects

Besides these major sects, we get some references to other Purāṇic gods and goddesses whose sculptural representations are also found in the province. We have images of such gods as Gaṇeśa, Kārtikeya, Indra, Agni, Kuvera, Sūrya, etc., from the 6th century onwards, but we have however no definite knowledge of their cults. In the next chapter, it will be shown that sculptures of Gaṇeśa are met with in almost all temples, but there is not sufficient evidence to prove the prevalence of Gāṇapatya in Assam. We have, however, a copper-plate of a later period (1392 A.D.) which opens its *praśasti* with the adoration of Gaṇapati: *namo*

75. Harjaravarman's Plates.

76. Subhañkarapāṭaka Grant, v. 9.

77. E.I., XVIII, pp. 329-30.

78. *Chāyā mahīnayi krodi piṇḍapradānaṇavṛṣṭi-piṇḍa-garbhamādāya sāraddhā vārāhasyaivala sundari tato syāḥ prābhavet putra Bheumastu Narakāsuraḥ Prāgjyotiṣānēca nagaramasya daṭṭānēca viṣṇunā.*

— V. 114-15

79. Chap. 140, v. 72, 75; Kokāmukhasvāmin; H. C. Choudhury, in B. C. Law Vol., Pt. I, pp. 89, 90.

*gaṇapataye vande.*<sup>80</sup> Vallabhadeva's Grant also invokes him as Lambodara,<sup>81</sup> and Vaidyadeva's Grant bears his seal.<sup>82</sup> The Kālikā Purāṇa also refers to the worship of most of these gods and describes in detail the procedure of their worship.<sup>83</sup> As lord of the yakṣas and kinnaras, Kuvera seems to be very popular among the semi-Hinduised people of the province. As a village deity, he is even today worshipped under different names, such as Jal Kuber, (the lord of water), Thal Kuber (the lord of earth) and so forth.<sup>84</sup> Sūrya also seems to have received special reverence, although there is no definite indication in the epigraphs regarding Sun-worship in Assam. In the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, however, occurs an expression āditya-bhaṭṭāraka, which Hoernle takes to mean "Holy Aditya", or in other words, the Sun-god.<sup>85</sup> But though the epigraphical evidence is meagre, a wide-spread of Sūrya-cult is attested to by the remains of early temples and images discovered in the province. Amongst the ruins of Tezpur belonging to about the sixth century A.D. are remnants, according to Banerji, "of a gigantic temple dedicated to Sūrya".<sup>86</sup> The prevalence of the Sun-cult has further been confirmed by the evidence in the Kālikā Purāṇa and in other texts. For instance, in connection with Sākkara Vrata, the Sāṅkhyaṇa Grhya Saṃgraha ordains that the student should visit the sacred country of Pragjyotiṣa before sunrise : *tato niṣkramya prāgjyotiṣam puṇyadeśam-upāgamya anudita āditye.*<sup>87</sup> The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa refers to the Sun-temple of Kāmarūpa, whose fame was spread far and wide. In narrating the account of King Rājyavardhana, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa states that, when this king began to grow old, he retired to the forest to perform austerities. Seeing this, the Brāhmaṇas of his kingdom, who were very much attached to him, resolved to propitiate the sun in order to restore the king to youth. Accordingly, they started to do penance. While they were striving to propitiate the sun, a gandharva named Sudāman came and spoke thus to them : "If ye desire, O drijas, to propitiate the sun let

80. S. Barua : Some ancient relics found in North Lakhimpur, J.A.R.S. III, pp. 39-47.

81. v. 1.

82. Op. Cit.

83. Chap. 79 gives description of the sacred places in Assam connected with the worship of various gods and goddesses.

84. Endle : The Kachāris, pp. 37 ff.

85. J.A.S.B., Op. Cit. For a different view see K.S., p. 129, f.n. 3.

86. A.R.A.S.I. 1925. In Goalpara there is a hill locally known as Sūrya Pāhār, which is believed to be associated with Sun-worship.

87. Chap. II, p. 38.

this be done, whereby the sun will be well pleased. There is a forest named Guru-Viśāla, frequented by *siddhas*, in the very mountain; Kāmarūpa; go there verily in haste. There perform your propitiation of the sun with minds completely composed; the *siddhas'* friendly region is there, there ye shall obtain all your desires". Having heard this, the Brāhmaṇas proceeded to that forest in Kāmarūpa and beheld there the sacred and beautiful shrine of the sun. The Brāhmaṇas, by continued austerities, succeeded in propitiating the sun and obtained from him a boon, prolonging the life of Rājyavardhana.<sup>88</sup>

Tārānātha also mentions that Sun-worship enjoyed a special favour in Assam. He refers to the fact that the people of Kāmarūpa were worshippers of the sun prior to the advent of the Buddhist monk Dhitika, who came there to convert them from Sun-worship to Buddhism. In order to persuade the Sun-worshippers to listen to him, Dhitika started by pretending that he was an envoy of the Sun-god; and having attracted their attention in this way, he there revealed the Buddhist gospel.<sup>89</sup> The Kālikā Purāṇa mentions the Sri Sūrya mountain which was the perpetual abode of the Sun god (*yatra deva ādityah satataṁ sthitah*). It also refers to the Citaraśaila or Arvāk hill where the *navagrahas* or nine planets were worshipped.<sup>89a</sup> Adicarita, which preserves the traditional account of the Bāra Bhūyas, refers in detail to the prevalence of Sun-worship in early Assam.<sup>89b</sup>

There are, however, at the present time, no distinct sects who reverence the sun and bear his name. The essentials of his worship are present everywhere and in many sects, more or less avowedly, or in disguise; and his practical and decisive influence on daily life, especially of the Brāhmaṇas, is universally recognised. The same conception may perhaps be recognised in the rites observed in the Bihu festivals of the province. Among the non-Aryan peoples of the province and the tribes, who may be described as on the borders of Hinduism, Sun-worship is much more open and confused. By these people the sun is widely invoked under the name of *Suraj-devatā* and is worshipped with prayer and sacrifice.<sup>90</sup>

88. Chap. 109; K. L. Barua: Kāmarūpa in the Mirkandeya Purāṇa, J.A.R.S., V, pp. 8-14.

89. Schiefner: Tārathe de Doctrinæ Buddhicæ in India Propagatione, p. 24.

89a. Sri Sūrya hill in Goalpara, the Arvāk near Gauhati.

89b. Sri Sri Adicarita, published by Mahendranath Bhattacharyya.

90. Das: Sun-worship among the Aboriginal Tribes of Eastern India, J.D.L., XI, pp. 90-91.

### 5. Rites and Rituals

A distinctive feature of orthodox Hindu society is the series of rites and rituals known as *śrauta*, those that are in accordance with *Śruti* or scriptural revelation, and *smārta*, those based only on religious tradition. *Smṛti*, concerning almost every stage of a man's life. We know in a general way that these *śrauta* and *smārtta* rites were performed since the fourth century A.D., when Brāhmaṇas, learned in the Vedas, began to settle in Assam in large numbers. Our epigraphs also offer us some information about the life and conduct of the people, especially of the Brāhmaṇas, which were regulated by the rites and ceremonies enjoined by these *Dharma-sāstras*.

Among the domestic rites (*gṛhya*), the *Smṛtis* enjoin the performance of the *pañca-mahāyajña* or five great sacrifices, namely, (i) *deva-yajña*, or offering to the gods, in which food was offered to five various deities; (ii) the *bhūta-yajña*, or *baliharaṇa*, an offering of different foods which were laid on carefully purified places for certain gods and spirits; (iii) the *pitr-yajña*, or offering to the fathers (deceased ancestors), to whom was given the residue left over from the last rite; (iv) the *brahma-yajña*, or offering to Brahma, i.e., the study of the Vedas; and (v) *manuṣya-yajña*, the offering to mankind, namely, the entertainment of guests.<sup>91</sup> Most of the Brāhmaṇas of our records are described as having performed these sacrifices. It is noticed earlier that in the Nidhanpur Grant endowments of land were specially made towards *bali*, *caru* and *satra*.<sup>92</sup> *Satras* are sacrificial sessions, which are to be performed by many a sacrificer, and only Brāhmaṇas who have consecrated the three Vedic fires can engage in *satras* except in the *sārasvata satra*. Their duration varies from twelve days to a year or more, and accordingly they are known as *rātrisatra* and *sāmvatsarika* (carried on for a year or more).<sup>93</sup>

Among other *śrauta* ceremonies, the *agnihotra*,<sup>94</sup> a form of *haviryajñas*, was fairly common. It was performed every morning and evening either by the *yajamāna* himself or by an *adhvaryu* priest. This rite was obligatory on Brāhmaṇas, and was in the nature of a *satra*, because it ended only with old age or death. The Grant of Balavarman relates that Devadharā, in his

91. *Antiquities of India*, pp. 145-146, 151.

92. *Op. Cit.*

93. *History of Dharmasāstra*, pp. 1239-1246.

94. The Bargāon Grant, Verse 17, refers to Devadatta, whose son was a regular performer of *agnihotra*.

capacity of an *adhvaryu* priest, performed the *vaitānika* rites (rites relating to three sacrificial fires) in due order without any confusion (*advaryyūṇā yena kṛtaṇi vibhajya vaitānikāṇi karmma nirā-kulena*).<sup>95</sup> According to the texts, the *adhvaryu* priest had to measure the ground, to build the altar, to prepare the sacrificial vessels, to fetch wood and water, to light the fire, to perform the *homa* (sacrifice), and whilst engaged in these duties, he had to repeat the appropriate hymns of the *Yajurveda*.<sup>96</sup> In *agnihotra*, the *homa* was performed with cow's milk for him who performed it as a sacred duty and not for any particular reward in view, but one who desired to secure a village or plenty of food, or strength or brilliance, employed respectively *yavāgu* (gruel), cooked rice, curds, or clarified butter. Elaborate rules are laid down in the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Sūtras* for milking the cow, boiling the milk and offering the same to the *gārhapatya* and *āhavaniya* fires.<sup>97</sup>

The *Khonāmukhi* Grant refers to a *Brāhmaṇa* who was a performer of the *agniṣṭoma* and other sacrifices. *Agniṣṭoma* is one of the seven *soma* sacrifices, and it is an *ekāha* or *aikāhika* (one day sacrifice). It is so called because in it Agni is praised or because the last chant is addressed to Agni. It is to be performed in *Vasanta* (spring) every year, and on the New Moon or Full Moon day.<sup>98</sup>

The Kṣatriyas appear, also, to have performed elaborate sacrifices. As noted previously, the great sacrifices, such as the *āśvamedha*, were performed by several kings of our period.<sup>99</sup> They are also said to have performed certain other sacrifices, but little is known of them.<sup>100</sup>

As recommended by Atri<sup>101</sup> and Vyāsa,<sup>102</sup> the *Brāhmaṇas* recited *sandhyā* thrice a day.<sup>103</sup> They also took three baths daily,<sup>104</sup> and observed various fasts and *vratas* or austere ceremonies. The epigraphs refer to such practices as being observed

95. v. 27.

96. Monier Williams: *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 24.

97. *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. I, Pt. II, pp. 998-1008.

98. For detailed description, see *Ibid.*, pp. 1133-1203.

99. Apart from the Vedic texts, the *Asvamedhaparva* of the *Mahābhārata* describes it at great length.

100. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 28; Gauhāti Grant of Indrapāla, v. 10. Subbañkarapāṭaka Grant, v. 7.

101. *Ācāremayūlka*, p. 39.

102. *Ibid.*

103. Puṣpabhadrā Grant v. 11.

104. *Ibid.*

both by kings and Brāhmaṇas. In the Nowgong Grant, there is a hint that the king Balavarman took a vow to absorb himself in the spirit of Maheśvara by means of fast: *anaścanavidhinā vīrastejasī māheśvarelinah*.<sup>105</sup> Such acts of self-sacrifice are met with in the contemporary epigraphic records of other provinces also. The Apshad inscription refers to Kumāra Gupta who burnt himself in fire at Prayāga.<sup>106</sup> Another inscription from Banikapur mentions the Gaigā king Narasimha II, who took the vow to fast for three days and attained rest (died).<sup>107</sup> Related with the Vedic idea of religion was the ascetic outlook on life. Tapas or ascetic practices formed an important part of the religious life of the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>108</sup> Pilgrimages were popular during the period. Referencees are met with to Brāhmaṇas making pilgrimage to various sacred places (*tīrtha*).<sup>109</sup> Both the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Yogini Tantra in their geographical sections have listed many sacred places of Assam. The Yogini Tantra places the *tīrthas* of Assam into nine categories and each one is styled as *yoni*. They are Bīthi, Upa-bīthi, Piṭha, Upa-piṭha, Siddha-piṭha, Mahāpiṭha, Brahmapiṭha, Viṣṇupiṭha, and Rudrapiṭha. Some of the important *tīrthas* mentioned both in the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Yogini Tantra were Siddheśvari, Apunarbhava, Urvaśi, Maṇikarneśvara, Pāṇḍurājā, Kāmākhyā, Aśvakrānta, Hayagriva, etc. Most of the sacred places were situated either on the river banks or on the tops of mountains. Various were the merits of bath, worship, and offering of *pindā* in these *tīrthas*.

The ultra-sacredness of the place where the two holy rivers, the Ganges and the Yamunā united, was already well-known.<sup>110</sup> It appears that the river Lauhitya had already attained religious sanctity.<sup>111</sup> The Kālikā Purāṇa devotes an entire section on the Lauhitya. Manuals on *Brahmaputra māhātmya* also began to be written during this time. It is said that mere bath in the Lauhitya leads to emancipation (*Lauhitya toye yaḥ snāti sa kaivalyam vāpnuyāt*)<sup>112</sup> and purification of all sins (*Lohityam nāma tattīrtham snānānnaśyati pātakam*).<sup>113</sup> Besides the Lauhitya,

105. v. 17. Also verse 15 of the Bargiion Grant leads us to think that Brahmapāda committed religious suicide.

106. C.I.J., 111, p. 225.

107. E.I., V. p. 180.

108. Grant of Balavarman, v. 26.

109. Karnaulli Grant.

110. Puṣpabhadra Grant.

111. Grant of Vanamāla, v. 1.

112. Kālikā Purāṇa 83/38.

113. Yogini Tantra, 11/vi-6-9

other rivers of Assam are also described as containing holy waters due to their association with tīrthas (*Tatra yadyajjalām . . . . tatsarvam tīrthameva hi*).<sup>114</sup>

The earning of merit through charity, as enjoined by the *Smṛitis* and the *Purāṇas*, was a common practice. The epigraphs themselves are witness to this, for they are mainly deeds of benefaction. Verses regarding dāna were cited in the inscriptions of the land grants from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. These verses affirm the beneficial nature of the gifts and proclaim the merits accruing therefrom and condemn those who deprive the grantees of land to future evils. In the religious texts, gifts of certain kinds are called *mahādāna*. According to the *Agni Purāṇa*, the *mahādāna* were ten, namely, gifts of gold, horses, sesame, elephants, maids, chariots, land, house, bride, and a dark-brown cow.<sup>115</sup> In some *Purāṇas* they are, however, enumerated as sixteen of which *tulāpuruṣa* is the chief.<sup>116</sup> In the Śilimpur Grant, as noted above, King Jayapāla of Kāmarūpa is said to have made a *tulāpuruṣa* gift, which consisted in giving away a quantity of gold equivalent to one's weight. Hemādri in *Dānakhaṇḍa*<sup>117</sup> devotes a long passage to the method of carrying out the *tulādāna*. The rite was accompanied by a *homa*, the donor stepped into one of the pans of the balance and the other pan was filled up with pure gold. After the ceremony, half of the gold was given to the *guru*, and the other half was distributed among Brāhmaṇas. From the Grant of Vanamāla, it also appears that during the period, besides others, the gifts of elephants, horses and women were common.<sup>118</sup> But of all these gifts, the gift of land, both *bhūmi* and *agrahāra*, was regarded as the most meritorious. For it was laid down that the donor of a piece of land resided in heaven for sixty thousand years in happiness.<sup>119</sup> It is interesting to note that there is evidence of gift of land by kings to young Brāhmaṇas after their *Samāvartana* (completion of study) to enable them to marry and settle down as householders.<sup>120</sup> The manner of such *naiveśikadāna* as quoted by Aparārka from the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is as follows: "The donor should choose eleven Brāhmaṇas of śrotriya families (devoted to the study of the Veda)

114. *Ibid.*, 1/11-24.

115. *Agni Purāṇa*, 209 v. 23-24.

116. *Matṛya*, Chap. 274-289; *Agni*, Chap. 210.

117. P. 166, p. 345.

118. v. 29.

119. *Nidhanpur Grant*, v. 27.

120. *Grant of Balavarman*, v. 31.

and of good character and conduct, should build eleven houses for them, should get them married at his expense, should furnish the houses with stores of corn, with cattle and maid-servants, beds, seats, vessels of clay and copper and other utensils for taking food, and with garments, and having thus furnished the houses, should settle the eleven Brāhmaṇas in the eleven houses and for their maintenance bestow upon each one hundred *nivartanas* of land or a hamlet, or half a village ; he should induce the Brāhmaṇas to be *agnihotrins*. By so doing he secures all the merits that are secured by the performance of sacrifices, *vratas*, various *dānas* or pilgrimages to sacred places and enjoys in heaven all pleasures".<sup>121</sup>

As to the general procedure and proper times of gifts, it seems that the rules laid down in the *Dharmaśāstras* were followed ; according to which gifts made on certain occasions were more meritorious than at other times. The donor used to make gifts after taking a bath.<sup>122</sup> Some of the grants have been made on the monthly *sāṃkrāntis*, the sanctity of which has been recognised by the *Laghu-sātātpara Smṛti*.<sup>123</sup> The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman was issued on the *Viṣuvat tithi*, which probably corresponds with the *Caitra sāṃkrānti*.<sup>124</sup> The Gauhati Grant of Ratnapāla was made on the *Viṣṇupadi sāṃkrānti*.<sup>125</sup> Both these days are even today considered holy and auspicious for making donations to the Brāhmaṇas. These days are still observed in Assam as festival days and are commonly known as *Bihu*.<sup>126</sup> The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva was made on the *Ekādaśi* day of *Viṣṇuvati* in *Vaisāka*.<sup>127</sup> Vallabhadeva made his gift in the *Saka* year 1107, at the sun's auspicious progress to the north at an auspicious moment, and under a happy sign of the zodiac (*śāke naga-nabho-rudraiḥ  
rāmīkhyāta cha-ttarājne śubhe śubhe kṣaparāśan saste*).<sup>128</sup>

A word is to be said about the object of these grants. The ostensible object in all such land grants is no doubt the enhancement of the fame and religious merit of the donor and his parents.

121. P. 377.

122. Grant of Balavarman, v. 32.

123. v. xx. 147.

124. K. S. p. 87, fn. 7.

125. v. 20. King Lakṣminārāyaṇa made a grant of two hundred punds of land to Rabideva Brāhmaṇa on the sacred day of *Viṣnu Samkrānti*. Vide Some ancient relics found in North Lakshmpur. *J.A.R.S.*, III, p. 42.

126. Barua: Bahāg Bihu, *Hindusthan Standard*, Puja Special, 1939 : Fertility Festival in Assam, *Ibid.*, 1st May 1945 : Bihu and its probable relation with Fire Festivals, *J.A.R.S.*, IX, pp. 73ff.

127. Op. Cit.

128. v. 16.

Considering the fact that such acts of charity with a religious motive or with a view to social or public welfare was deemed to be a commendable thing because it would bring in its train not merely religious merit but public applause, that is, fame and renown for the donor and his parents, we may well infer that at the back of such endowments there was also the desire to encourage others to follow such examples of charity. This has been clearly suggested in the Vallabhadeva's Grant, where, in setting up an almshouse, it is recorded : "People who, religious by nature and with their minds solely directed to acts of religion, do anything whatever here in regard to this almshouse, may they with their children and children's children enjoy prosperity in this world, and in the life to come obtain the manifold delights of everlasting glorious heaven."<sup>129</sup> We may therefore treat these grants to some extent as being utilitarian, that is to say, as being prompted by a motive to move the public mind towards some noble object or object of public good.

#### 6. Buddhism

The expressions *dharma* and *tathāgata* which occur respectively in Bhāskaravarman's and Indrapāla's Grants have led some scholars to believe that Buddhism did exist in Assam at an early period.<sup>130</sup> But except for surmise on these terms, the epigraphs are not very expressive, neither has archaeology produced any evidence of importance.<sup>131</sup> In his account of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa, the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang remarked that the people had no faith in Buddha and hence from the time when Buddha appeared in the world to the present time (7th century A.D.)

129. v. 27.

130. For the view regarding existence of Buddhism in early Assam, see K. L. Barua: *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, pp. 142 ff; S. C. Goswami: *Hidden Traces of Buddhism* I.H.Q. iii, pp. 747 ff; Roy: *Buddhism in Assam*, J.A.R.S. IV, pp. 18-22; Ghose: *Buddhism in Kāmarūpa and Sylhet*, *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49; Nath: *Śaṅkarāchāryya and Buddhism in Assam*, *Ibid.*, pp. 31-39.

131. In his *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, Barua refers to some sculptural representations of Buddha on stone and terracotta plaques. Besides being portable in nature, so that they might have been imported from outside, they are so few that nothing can definitely be ascertained from them.

It is, however curious to note that the Buddhists of Tibet and Bhutan believe that the death of Buddha happened in a town west of Assam, and they identify it with the modern temple of Hājo. And in this belief, even to-day, Buddhist pilgrims from all parts of Bhutān, Tibet and even from Lādakh and South Western China, visit this spot Waddell: *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, pp. 307-314.

there had never, as yet been built one *Saṅghārāma* as a place for priests to assemble.<sup>132</sup>

The Tibetan historian Tārānātha, in his History of Buddhism, compiled in the year 1608, however, refers to the introduction and prevalence of Buddhism in Kāmarūpa in later years. We have already mentioned the Buddhist teacher Dhitika, who according to Tārānātha, was responsible for converting the people of Kāmarūpa from Sun-worship to Buddhism.<sup>133</sup>

Among Dhitika's converts in Kāmarūpa was a *Siddha*, who organised a great feast for all the priests of the four regions in order to diffuse the Buddhist gospel. Tārānātha further refers to one Aśvabhava, who preached the Māhāyāna doctrine in Kāmarūpa. It is narrated that once, when Aśvabhava was in Kāmarūpa making converts and teaching pupils, among the upāsakas, a great sensation was caused by an incident with a poisonous serpent. The serpent attacked some of his pupils and they were immediately struck down, but as soon as some holy water was sprinkled over them, they recovered.<sup>134</sup> This incident is significant, for it throws some light on the nature of the Buddhist teachings prevalent in the province during the period. From the latter part of the seventh century A.D., Buddhism underwent radical changes, developing into several forms of mystic cults known as *Mantrayāna*, *Vajrayāna* and *Tantrayāna*.<sup>135</sup> We have evidence to show that these systems gained ground in Assam, which was already noted for the esoteric doctrines of Tāntric Śaktism. Both the Indian and Tibetan sources provide us with materials regarding the prevalence of later Buddhism in the form of *Vajrayāna* in Assam.<sup>136</sup>

The monks who were responsible for spreading the various systems associated with *Vajrayāna* were known as *Siddhas*, and according to the tradition, they were eighty-four in number. The general belief among scholars is that some of the prominent *Siddhas* of this traditional list, such as Saraha,<sup>137</sup> Nāgārjuna and Luipā, either hailed from or propounded their doctrine in Kāma-

132. Watters, II, p. 186.

133. Loc. Cit.

134. Op. Cit., p. 199.

135. For an account of Buddhist Tāntrism. See L. Dela Vallee Poussin: Tāntrism (Buddhism), E.R.E., XII, pp. 193ff; Bhattacharya's *Siddhanamālā*, II, Introduction, p. xli; Origin and Development of *Vajrayāna*, I.H.Q. 1927, pp. 733-46, and Glimpses of *Vajrayāna*, Proceedings and Transactions of the All-India Oriental Conference, III, pp. 133ff.

136. Bhattacharya: Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism, p. 46.

137. Cordier suggests that there were several *Siddhas* with the name Saraha, p. 232.

rūpa. The *Pag Sam Zon Jang* (1747 A.D.) refers to Saraha or Rāhulabhadra as having been born of a Brāhmaṇa and a Dākīnī in the city of Rājñī in the eastern country. This city of Rājñī was probably the small principality of Rānī (in the Kāmrūp-Goalpara districts, Assam) which was in later times a feudatory of the Ahoms.<sup>138</sup> Grünwedel and Tucci both hold that Saraha was a Śūdra from Kāmarūpa.<sup>139</sup> The disciple of Saraha was Nāgārjuna, who was well-known in "Kāmarūpa, Nepal and Bhutan." Luipā, known as Minanātha or Matsyendranātha, according to the Tibetan tradition, was also from Assam.<sup>140</sup> In his introduction to the *Kau-lajñāna-nirṇaya*, Dr. Bagchi holds that Minanātha was born on a sea-coast on an island called Candradvipa, in eastern India. He was the originator of the doctrine of *Kula*, a form of Buddhist mysticism developing out of Sāktism. Jayaratha in his commentary on the celebrated *Tantrāloka* of Abhinavagupta, refers to the story of the origin of *Kaulism*. He quotes a verse, presumably from an original Tantra work, which states that originally the doctrine was acquired by Bhairavi, the goddess, from Bhairava, the terrifying god, and then from her by Mīna, the Macchana, the great-souled Siddha, in the *Mahāpiṭha* of Kāmarūpa: *bhairavyā bhairavāt prāptam yogam vyāpya priye tatsakāśātu siddhena mīnākhyena varānane kāmarūpe mahāpiṭhe macchandena mahātmanā.*<sup>141</sup> Thus Minanātha is credited with the promulgation of the doctrine known as *Yoginī-kaula* which became popular in Kāmarūpa: *Kāmākhye giyate nāthe mahāmatsyodarsthitiḥ.*<sup>142</sup> Rāhula

138. K. L. Barua: Kāmarūpa and Vajrayāna, *J.A.R.S.* II, pp. 47ff.  
 139. *J.P.A.S.B.* (N.S.), XXVI, pp. 133-141.

140. In the *Pag Sam Zon Jang*, Luipā is said to have been a fisherman of Oddiyāna who rose to be a writer in the employee of the king of Oddiyāna known as Samantaśubha (*Sādhanamālā*, II, p. xlviil). In the Tibetan works *Grub to'b* and *Bka'-cbabs-bdan-Idan*, however it is stated that the Siddha named Minanātha was from Kāmarūpa. *J.P.A.S.B.*, *Ibid.* Various legends are associated with the name of Matsyendranātha. See Chakravarti: Some New Facts about Matsyendranātha, *I.H.Q.*, V, pp. 177-81; Ghose: Some additional Notes on Matsyendranātha, *I.H.Q.*, *Ibid.*, pp. 562-564. There are also different views regarding identification of Luipā with Matsyendranātha or Minanātha. Majority, however, holds the above view. His date is also uncertain. Tārānātha and Levi would place him in the seventh century, while Bagchi and others assign him to the eleventh century A.D.

Following Benoytosh Bhattacharya, some scholars incline to locate Oddiyāna and Lankāpuri, two places connected with Vajrayāna, in Assam. *J.B.O.R.S.* 1928, p. 34. For criticism of this view see Bagchi's Review to *Sādhanamālā* II. *I.H.Q.*, VI, pp. 578-587.

141. *Tantrāloka*, pp. 24-25.

142. *Kaula-jñāna-nirṇaya*, p. 44.

Sāṅkṛityāyana refers to the fact that a work, namely, *Bāhyantara-bodhicitta-bandhopadeśa*, was composed by Miṇanātha in a language which is very much similar to old Assamese.

In this connection mention may be made of the vast mass of writings in early Assamese known as *mantra*, which bear the distinct stamp of Vajrayāna tenets. These *Mantraputhis* (books on magical charms) composed in mystic words and syllables contain magic formulae against snake-bite, demons, evil doers, &c., and various spells for healing of diseases and winning of good fortune and desired ends. Most of these *mantras* bear the impress of the Buddhistic *Dhāraṇī Suttas*.

### 7. General Review

Speaking about the prevailing religion and diverse sects of the country, Hiuen Tsiang remarked that there were as many as a hundred *Deva* temples in Kāmarūpa as well as the shrines of other sects to the number of several myriads.<sup>143</sup> Both from the epigraphs and images we have also shown that various Brāhmaṇical cults were prevalent during our period. But it should be noted that the religious temper of the period was by no means sectarian, and there seems to have been complete harmony among the followers of the different religions. Not only did kings establish toleration, but they often patronised all sects in equal measure. Of Bhāskaravarman, the Chinese monk remarked that though the king had no faith in Buddha, yet he respected the learned *Sramanas*.<sup>144</sup> When the king first heard that a Śramaṇa (Hiuen Tsiang) from China had come to the Nālandā Saṅghārāma to study with diligence the profound law of Buddha, he sent by a special messenger a letter<sup>145</sup> for Śilabhadra, abbot of Nālandā, which was delivered to him after two days' journey from Assam. His request not being responded to, it was renewed through another messenger.<sup>146</sup>

Śilabhadra having received the letter, addressed the Master of Law thus : "With regard to that king, his better mind (or, virtuous mind) is fast bound and weak; within his territories the law of Buddha has not widely extended; since the time that he heard your honourable name, he has formed a deep attachment for you; perhaps you are destined to be in this period of your

143. Watters, II. P. 198.

144. *Ibid.*

145. The Seals of Bhāskaravarman discovered at Nālandā might have been the very seal accompanying this letter, as suggested by K. N. Dikshit, J.B.O.R.S. 1920, p. 151.

146. *Life of Hiuen Tsiang*, pp. 170-171.

existence his "good friend". Use your best diligence then and go. You have become a disciple in order to benefit the world, this then is perhaps your just opportunity : and as when you destroy a tree you have only to cut through the root, and the branches will of themselves wither away, so when you arrive in that country only cause the heart of the king to open (to the truth), and then the people will also be converted. But if you refuse and do not go, then perhaps there will be evil deeds done. Do not shrink from this slight trouble."<sup>147</sup>

Huien Tsiang then went with the envoy and arrived in Kāmarūpa. Bhāskaravarman was greatly rejoiced, and met him with his great officers, and paying him reverence with much ceremony, conducted him into his palace. Every day he arranged music and banquets, with religious offerings of flowers and incense, and requested him to follow the ordinary rules of religious fast days.<sup>148</sup> The Chinese pilgrim stayed at the capital for more than a month, after which he went with Bhāskaravarman to meet Harṣa. Both of them attended the Assembly at Kanauj and the *Mahā-mokṣa Pariṣad* at Prayāga. The Assembly at Kanauj was a Buddhist convocation, and was held to give the utmost publicity to and exhibit the refinements of the doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The proceedings of the Assembly were opened by a huge and solemn procession starting from Harṣa's resting-hall (palace of travel), constructed for the occasion, and the main object of attraction was a golden statue of the Buddha, about three feet high, which was carried on a gorgeously caparisoned elephant. This was accompanied by Harṣa in person, who was attired as the god Śakra, with a white chowrie in his hand, whilst his friend and ally, Bhāskaravarman, was also in attendance with a precious parasol in his hand and in the guise of the god Brahmā.<sup>149</sup>

The proceedings of the *Mahā-mokṣa Pariṣad* lasted for seventy-five days, and the religious services associated with the ceremony were of a curiously eclectic kind. In this assembly, besides Buddha, the images of Ādityadeva (Sun) and Iśvaradeva (Śiva) were worshipped with various rites.<sup>150</sup> This account of Bhāskaravarman's relation with the Chinese traveller and his active participation in the religious ceremonies organised by Harṣa is most illuminating in regard to the spirit of toleration maintained by the kings

147. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

148. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

of Assam. The Chinese author Hwui-li, further informs us that after the termination of the proceedings of the Prayāga convocation, when Hiuen Tsiang desired to leave for China, Bhāskaravarman proposing to build 100 Buddhist monasteries in his kingdom, said, "If the Master is able to dwell in my dominions and receive my religious offerings, I will undertake to found 100 monasteries on the Master's behalf."<sup>151</sup>

Still more interesting are the instances in which a king openly declared his devotion to more than one religious faith. It has been noted that Dharmapāla paid reverence both to Śiva and Viṣṇu.<sup>152</sup> Vaidyadeva described himself both as *Paramamāheśvara* and *Parama-vaiṣṇava*.<sup>153</sup> Vallabhadeva invoked both Bhāgavata Vāsudeva and Lambodara.<sup>154</sup> The toleration of the Kāmarūpa rulers can be determined even from their names. Thus, though the name Vanamāla suggests that he might have been a Vaiṣṇava, it has been shown already that he was an ardent devotee of Śiva. The Guākuchi Grant of Indrapāla may be considered to be a landmark in the history of toleration. Although in the *praśasti* of the epigraph, Indrapāla invokes Paśupati Prajādhinātha, the plate also bears the figures of Vaiṣṇavite symbols such as *sankha*, *cakra*, *padma* and *Garuda*.<sup>155</sup>

In this connection it is also remarkable that the Kālikā Purāṇa, though a text solely devoted to the worship of the Devī, contains sections eulogising the worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and other gods.

151. Pp. 187-188

152. Op. Cit.

153. Kamauli Grant.

154. Op. Cit.

155. Bhattacharya: *Adbhuta-tāmra-sāsana, Hara-Prasida-kampurdhana-lakhamalā* ( Bengali ), pp. 164-166

## CHAPTER VII

### FINE ARTS

#### I. ARCHITECTURE

##### 1. General Remarks

The erection of temples in Assam goes back to an early century; at any rate, the existence of numerous shrines dedicated to Śiva, Sūrya, Viṣṇu, Devi and other deities is fully attested to both by inscriptions and the contemporary literature. The Grant of Vanamāla relates that the king re-erected the lofty temple of Hāṭaka Śiva (like a peak of the Himalayas) which had fallen down.<sup>1</sup> The king is further said to have erected a huge palace consisting of many rooms with decorative carvings.<sup>2</sup> The inscription of Indrapālā states that Ratnapālā throughout his kingdom constructed numerous white temples.<sup>3</sup> Hiuen Tsiang in his account, mentions the existence of hundreds of Deva temples in Kāmarūpa.<sup>4</sup>

But to-day not one of these early edifices exists, and the only memorials of ancient times consist of jungle-clad mounds scattered in such places as Gauhati,<sup>5</sup> Tezpur,<sup>6</sup> Nowgong,<sup>7</sup> Sibsagar,<sup>8</sup> Sadiya,<sup>9</sup> and a few brick-built temples belonging to a comparatively late period. The reason for this total obliteration of old sites, as given by Gait, is that nature has vied with man in destroying them. The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial country, and the impetuous, snowfed rivers which debouch from the Himalayas find so little resistance in its friable soil that they are constantly carving out new channels and cutting away their banks; consequently no buildings erected in their neighbourhood can be

1. V. 24.

2. Grant of Balavarman, V. 14.

3. Gauhati Grant, V. 10.

4. Watters, Vol. II, p. 188.

5. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1903; 1912-13, p. 41; 1917-18, pp. 49-51; 1920-21, pp. 37ff.

6. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25; 1925-26; 1928-29.

7. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1920-21, 1936-37.

8. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1902, p. 17; 1905, pp. 3ff.

A.R.A.S.I., 1923-24; 1927-28.

9. A.R.A.S.I., 1906-7, pp. 26ff.

expected to remain for more than a limited time, except at a few points like Gauhati, Tezpur, where the solid rock pierces through the alluvium. Further, though occurring at distant intervals, violent earthquakes are, in Assam, quite as great a cause of destruction as fluvial action. A less sudden, but almost equally potent, cause of damage is found in the luxuriant vegetation of the country. Instances are also not wanting where religious zeal led the early Mohammedan invaders to raze the temples to the ground.<sup>10</sup>

We have, therefore, very little material at our disposal for writing the history of the early architecture of the province. All that we can do is to piece together some information from other sources, such, for example, as inscriptions and the iconography of the extant stone reliefs. It should further be noted that the knowledge that we may gather from illustrations on stone is almost all of religious buildings, and we have thus no information of the secular architecture of the period. In this connection, we should also like to make clear the fact that in Assam, till now, no systematic excavation nor any exploration work has been undertaken. The small number of architectural and sculptural specimens that we find to-day are due to chance findings. On account of the paucity of specimens, naturally, our observation on the art and sculpture of the period would be inadequate.

## 2. Architectural Remains

Before passing over this account of the architecture of the province, we should like to draw attention to a few early remains that are worthy of notice. One of these earliest remains (c. 600 A.D.), of a stone temple, is seen in a small village called Dah Parbatiya near the town of Tezpur in the Darrang district.<sup>11</sup> The ruins, besides other architectural stone carvings, consist of an exquisite door-frame (Fig. 2), which, according to R. D. Banerji, belongs to the Pāṭaliputra school.<sup>12</sup> The door-frame, though not connected with any dated inscription, is, in the opinion of the same scholar, undoubtedly of the Gupta age, because of its use of

- (1) trefoil medallions in caitya-windows on the lintel,
- (2) the use of the figures of river goddesses on the lower parts of jambs,
- (3) the false recessed angles of the lintel,

10. Gait : *A History of Assam*, p. 21.

11. A.R.A.S.I., 1922-23, pp. 119-20; 1924-25, pp. 98-99.

12. *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 194-196.

- (4) the flying figure in high relief in the centre of the lower part of the lintel, and
- (5) the particularly expressive figures of *ganas* on the arms of the cruciform bracket capitals of the pilasters.<sup>13</sup>

This beautiful lintel is one of the best specimens of its class of the Gupta period. The carving on the jambs is continued overhead in four out of the five bands. The lower part of the jambs consists of single panels, in very high relief against which are the figures of the river goddesses with female attendants on each side. The river goddesses exceed the limits of the panel but the attendant figurines have been kept very well within bounds. There are three attendants in the case of Gaigā on the right, but two only in that of Yamunā to the left. Behind the back of each figure appear two flying geese pecking at the halo of the goddess, a new feature in the Gupta art. There are five bands of ornaments on each jamb:—

- (1) A meandering creeper rising above the head of a Nāga.
- (2) The body of the Nāga and the Nāgi rising from the top of the square panel at the bottom of each jamb and continued between the first and second bands on the lintel. The tails of these two serpents are held by the figures of Garuda in high relief against the lower part of the lintel, and
- (3) Ornamental foliage consisting of a straight stem with *amorini* clinging to it. These three bands are continued overhead on the lintel as its lowermost bands of ornaments.
- (4) A pilaster, square in section bearing on it square bosses covered with arabesque as projections, which acts as supports to a number of human or divine figures and ends in a cruciform bracket capital.
- (5) A double intertwined creeper forming conventional rosettes which is continued on the side projection of the lintel.

The lintel consists of a separate piece in which the lower part bears the first three bands of the jambs. The fourth band, the pilaster appears to support an architrave bearing on it five *caitya*-windows of two different types: (a) a trefoil in which all three arcs are of the same size; there are three *caitya*-windows with such medallions, one in the centre and two near the ends: (b) also trefoils in which the upper arc is larger than the two arcs on the sides. The central medallion of these five contains a seated figure of Śiva as Lakuliśa.<sup>14</sup>

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

Among the architectural remains of another temple (c. 1000 A.D.), discovered near Tezpur, which is worth mentioning, are two remarkable shafts of pillars. The shaft of one of these pillars (Fig. 4) is sixteen-sided, the upper end being ornamental with a broad band having *kirtimukhas* at the top and the lower with dentils. Over this band the shaft is round and appears to be lathe-turned like the upper parts of the Western Cālukya columns of the Bombay Presidency. In the second pillar, the upper part of the shaft is dodecagonal and near the top is divided into three raised horizontal bands two of which contain *kirtimukhas* and the third a series of diamond-shaped rosettes. In style, both of them belong to the same period and appear to have come from one and the same building.<sup>15</sup>

Architectural remains belonging to different periods and ranging from the sixth century A.D., are further noticed in Kāmākhya, Hājo, Dabakā, Numaligarh, Sibsagar and Sadiya. But in the present state of our knowledge, it is hardly possible to offer any clear description on these ruins.

## II. SCULPTURE

### 1. Introduction

The majority of sculptures that have hitherto been found in the province are of gods, goddesses, and other semi-divine figures which served as an ornament to architecture. These figures were executed in conformity with the canons laid down in the *Silpa Śāstras*, and as such they resemble in form, proportion, and features, similar sculptures of north-eastern India of the period. Like Indian sculpture in general,<sup>16</sup> our sculptures may also be divided into three classes :—

- (i) sculpture of human forms including gods and goddesses,
- (ii) sculpture of animal forms,
- (iii) sculpture of designs,

The sculpture of human forms falls into two further classes :—

- (a) representation of gods and goddesses,
- (b) representation of human figures.

15. A.R.A.S.J., 1924-25, p. 95.

16. H. D. Sankalia : *The Archaeology of Gujarat*, p. 115.

## 2. Sculpture of Human Forms

## (i) Figures of Yakṣa, Yakṣinī, Vidyādhara, etc.

Representation of human forms other than those of gods and goddesses is limited to a few persons. The most common form of this type are the figures of *yakṣa*, *yakṣinī*, *vidyādhara*, etc., which seem to be more human than divine in form.<sup>17</sup> Representations of *yakṣa*, *vidyādhara*, *gandharva*, *apsarā*, *kinnara* occur in all early architecture. They are usually made to serve as special attendants to the deities sculptured on the walls of a temple, and sometimes as chowrie-bearers. They are generally depicted with two hands, two eyes and a *karanḍamakuta*. Figures with more than two hands are also occasionally met with. Such is the figure in Illustration 6, where a *kinnari* is seen with a bow in hand, the charm and elegance surviving even through the mutilated figure. The ceiling slab from the Śiva temple, Deo Parbat, bears the carving of an embossed lotus (*viśva padma*).<sup>18</sup> The second vessel of the *viśva padma* bears in relief the figure of a *vidyādhara* holding a scarf or a necklace with both hands and hovering in the sky as if to make obeisance to the deity below. His legs are so arranged as to be symmetrical with the circular course of the seed-vessel, a feature generally met with in Gupta and Pāla sculptures of Bengal. While the facial-type is local, the decorative and anatomical details of the *vidyādhara* recall late Gupta and Pāla features.<sup>19</sup> A high crown (*kirīṭa-mukuṭa*) with a frontal coronet adorns his head, perforated *patra-kundala* are seen in the ears while his undergarment reaching the ankles has an elegant central tassel. *Dvārapāla* and *dvārapālikā* are seen at the entrance of almost every temple. The *Śilpa Saṃgraha* states that in form, the *dvārapālas* are like *bhūtas* with two big hands, and in one of which they hold a club. Usually, in their hands they hold symbols representing the deity of the temple over which they keep guard. The door-keepers of the Śaiva temple at Gāchital, Nowgong, for instance, are seen holding Śaivite symbols, such as *śūla* and *pāśa*.<sup>20</sup> Figures of *dvārapālas* are seen in a Viṣṇu temple, North Gauhati. Here the *dvārapālas* are standing

17. For origin and description of these groups of semi-divine figures, see W. J. Wilkins' *Hindu Mythology*, Chsp. XI., X. J. N. Banerjee: *Vidyādhara*, *J.I.S.O.A.* IV. pp. 52-56.

18. T. N. Ramachandran: *Explorations in Assam*, *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1936-7, p. 58.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 56. In the *Śilpasāstra* the *dvārapālas* of Śiva temple are stated to be Nandi and Mahikāla at the eastern entrance; Bhṛigl and Vināyaka at the southern entrance; the sacred Bull and Skanda at the western entrance, and Candi at the northern entrance.

on both legs, and thus signifying the idea of alertness and firmness. The standing figures in Illustration 10 is of a *dvārapālikā* from a tenth century Viṣṇu temple, Sibsagar. The figure is slightly bent and in folded hands, indicating the attitude of devotion. She is wearing a pair of *khāru*, a form of bracelet, with several annulets arranged in a tapering form, and round her waist are three girdles. She has a necklace and *putra-kuṇḍala* in her ears. Another richly adorned *dvārapālikā* in the *tribhanga* pose with her right leg resting on the left, is in the Assam Provincial Museum at Gauhati. She wears circular ear-ornaments, and a number of *hāras*. Her girdle and the folds of the lower garment are gracefully designed.<sup>21</sup>

The earliest representation of a human figure is found on some terracotta plaques recovered in 1926 from the ruins at Dah Parbatiya, "which according to the moulding of the torso and the general technique", remarks R. D. Banerji, "proves beyond doubt that these plaques cannot be later in date than the sixth century A.D." (Fig. 11).<sup>22</sup> They show the nice poise and the naturalism of the human figure.<sup>23</sup>

### (ii) Mithuna Figures.

By far the most interesting of the human figures are the scenes with *mithuna* couples, which can be seen, for instance, on the panels of the Śaiva and Śākta shrines. An oft-quoted Sanskrit verse represents Śiva as saying: *maithunena mahāyogī mama tulyo na samśayah*. It is also a fact that the left-hand Śākta rites are connected with the performance of the five *ma-kāras*, namely, *matsya*, *mūdrā*, *madya*, *māṃsa* and *maithuna*. The occurrence of these figures mainly in Śaiva and Śākta temples, as suggested by Sir William Rothenstein, was "a part of the Tantric attitude which was characteristic of Indian religious philosophy between the 10th and 12th centuries".<sup>24</sup> It appears that these erotic sculptures have the support of the traditional practices of centuries of temple building, and have been enjoined by the sacred texts such as the *Kāmasūtra*. In fact, the *Agni Purāṇa* enjoins that the doorway of a shrine should be decorated with *mithunas*: *mithunairbibhūṣayed*.<sup>25</sup>

21. The image is recently acquired by the A.P.M.

22. A.R.A.S.I., 1925-26, p. 110.

23. *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, p. 208.

24. Codrington: *Ancient India*, p. 6.

25. O. C. Gangoly: *The Mithuna in Indian Art*, Rupam, Nos. 22 and 23, 1925, pp. 54-6; Tarapada Bhattacharya: *Some Notes on the Mithuna in Indian Art*, Rupam, No. 1, 1926, pp. 22-24.

Illustrations 14-15 are specimens of such erotic sculptures from the Śākta temple at Kāinākhyā. Godwin-Austen, referring to the ruins of a temple at Numaligarh, observed that its panel figures are "most obscene in character".<sup>26</sup> Not only men and women, but even animals are shown in amorous poses. Such is the illustration in Fig. 16, a terracotta plaque bearing a pair of peacocks found in the Śākta shrine at Sadiya. Another frieze, from the Śiva temple at Deo Parbat, shows a royal archer shooting a deer couple when in coition. The scene seems to represent, according to T. N. Ramachandran, the *Mahābhārata* story of Pāṇḍu, the father of the Pāṇḍavas, who was cursed to die with his sexual desires ungratified as a result of his having shot a deer couple (really a sage and his wife in the guise of deer) in coition.<sup>27</sup>

### (iii) *Dancing Figures*

Another set of sculptures, that formed the integral part of temple decoration, is of dancing figures. From the earliest times, dancing, which can express so much that is necessary in the act of worship, thanksgiving, praise, supplication and humiliation, has been associated with the ceremonial functions of temples. It is therefore no wonder that dancing figures should profusely decorate the walls of temples. We have the earliest dancing scene in a slab recovered from Tezpur. The slab (Fig. 20) is divided into a number of sunken panels by means of circular pilasters, each containing a male or female, two females, or two males. Beginning from the right we find a man fighting with a lion, a male playing on a flute, and a female dancing by his side, one male playing on a pipe, another on a drum, a male playing on a drum and a female dancing, a man playing on cymbals and a woman dancing, a male playing on a lyre and another dancing to his right, a male playing on a drum and another dancing to his left.<sup>28</sup> The whole composition seems to be natural, full of action, and lively, and is represented with considerable success. A more interesting and complicated dancing figure of the time is recovered from the Deo Parbat ruins (Fig. 21). Here is shown a śikhara of foliage with āmalaka and lotus-bud filial flanked by a god and goddesses both dancing with their legs resting on elephants in turn supported by lotuses. Both the gods and goddesses have four hands holding

26. J.A.S.B. XLIII, pt. I, 1874, p. 5.

27. *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.

28. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 97.

bow, arrow, rosary and sword (staff) and with perforated *patra-kuṇḍala* in the ears and a *kirīṭi-mukuṣa* on the head with a frontal tiara.<sup>29</sup>

Besides group scenes, independent figures are also represented in different dancing poses. A sculpture with a male figure from Kāmākhyā (c. 800 A.D.) is executed with geometrical precision, gracefully portraying the curve of the body. The head is inclined towards the right shoulder, the left hand is moved round the head so as to touch the fingers of the right hand, the arm of which is stretched upwards in a straight line. In spite of the mutilated face, the figure seems remarkable for the elegance of the pose.

#### (iv) *Scenes from Epics and Contemporary Life*

The temple walls were generally decorated with sculptures depicting various scenes from the Epics. We have already noticed a frieze from the Deo Parbat ruins which illustrates the *Mahābhārata* story of Pāṇḍu. Another frieze (Fig. 22) from the same ruins, having five panels, shows Rāma and Lakṣmana seated, the latter behind the former, while Sugrīva is kneeling before Rāma in supplication, and Hanumāna and another monkey are watching the scene with reverence. The scene portrayed evidently relates to the incident from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in which Hanumāna succeeded in securing the friendship of Rāma for the protection of Sugrīva. Another frieze found in the same place represents a well-known scene from the *Mahābhārata*, namely, the *Garuḍa-garvabhaṅga*, or the extermination of Garuḍa's pride.<sup>30</sup>

But more important than this infinite variety of mythological decorations was the portrayal of contemporary life. A study of the various scenes from life represented in the panels of the temple-walls may give us some glimpse of the social and domestic life led by the people of the period. But the diversities of scenes of these sculptural depictions are so numerous that it is hardly possible here to do more than point out a few leading varieties. We will refer only to a few representations that may give us some idea of the entire series. The earlier carvings recovered from the Kāmākhyā temple, which possibly date back to the seventh century A.D., bear some very suggestive panels. Among many other panels on the west gateway of the temple is seen a house-holder doing his daily worship, while his wife is engaged in suckling her child. (Fig. 23). This "mother and chlid" portrait

29. A.R.A.S.J., 1936-37 p. 58

30. Ibid., Plate XIX (a)

is not only lively and natural, but also of singular beauty. On another frieze are observed two other carvings: one shows a woman worshipper kneeling and pouring water from a spouted vessel into the mouth of an animal, and the other represents a conch-blower in profile with an *usnīṣa* on the head and a conch held to his mouth, the cheeks bulging out as in the act of blowing the conch.<sup>30a</sup> Another frieze from Deo Parbat belonging to the tenth century A.D. and consisting of three panels, illustrates (i) a woman in her toilet, (ii) a man dragging a fallen woman from a scene where another is about to thrash her, while a second woman is dissuading him, and (iii) a man advancing with a raised mace.<sup>30b</sup> A second frieze from the same place, which is divided into four panels, contains the following scenes from left to right: (a) an ascetic pushing a goat before him, (b) another ascetic dancing with *sūla* and *dhakkā* in his hands and *kamāṇḍalu* hanging from his right arm, and (c) a seated woman in an ecstatic mood. Yet another frieze divided into two big panels illustrates a combat between two warriors. The actual combat is shown in one panel, while in the other, one of the warriors marches off in triumph with the severed head of the other held in his hands, the headless trunk staggering behind.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Sculpture of Animal Forms

The animal carvings which adorn the walls and ceilings of temples may broadly be classified under three groups:

- (i) Animals studied from nature,
- (ii) Animals of symbolism,
- (iii) Grotesque animals.

Among the familiar animals, elephants are very common, and they were carved and chiselled with great skill. It has been pointed out earlier<sup>32</sup> that the elephant-head was used as a royal seal in Assam. In many temples a row of elephants, *gajathara*, appears as a basement moulding. On a moulding in the Hājo temple of about two feet above the plinth a row of caparisoned elephants in high relief encircles the building and appears to support the edifice. The elephants, all tuskers, are facing outwards, and standing each 16" in height, and are finely designed and executed

30a. *Ibid.* Plate XX (g) and (f).

30b. *A.R.A.S.J.*, 1936-37, p. 59.

31. *Ibid.* Plate XX.

32. Chap. III.

showing only their tusks, trunks and front legs (Fig. 25). Fragments of sandstone with elegantly sculptured elephant-heads in the attitude of supporting the superstructures of a temple are also found amidst the ruins of an eleventh century Śiva temple at Deo Parbat.<sup>33</sup> Similar pieces, showing elephants in profile where each pair has only a single head are also seen. Round the base, above the plinth, a temple at Seessee has a row of elephants showing the forelegs, in high relief.<sup>34</sup>

The lion became conventional in Assam. According to R. D. Banerji, "the conventional representation of the lion shows that the inhabitants of the Assam Valley were not very familiar with the king of beasts."<sup>35</sup> Stone slabs bearing huge lions standing *en couchant* and vanquished elephants are seen in the ruins of Tezpur<sup>36</sup> and Gāchtal. Nowgong.<sup>37</sup> Among the remains at Bamuni Hill were discovered two large stones with this "lion on elephant motif" bearing affinities to the work of the Pāla period of Bengal. Illustration in Fig. 26 is from a carving from Numaligarh, showing a lion *sejant* (*ryāla*). The representations of a pair of lions shown running from each other with their heads bent towards the *māngala kalaśa* (auspicious jar) are a very common decorative motif in early Assamese art.<sup>38</sup>

On the west side of the Kāmākhyā temple is a modern shrine, known as Ghanṭākarna, into the basement of which stone fragments of older temples have been built. On one of these fragments, as described by K. N. Dikshit, "is a beautifully carved frieze in which the band represents a series of garlands and the lower scroll-work, in which some very spirited representations of animals occur. Only four animal figures of these series, viz., a buffalo, a deer, a lion and a tiger are extant, but the quality of the art manifested in them is unsurpassed in Assam." Figures of bulls were sculptured especially in Śaiva shrines.<sup>39</sup> The bull as *rāhana* of Śiva in Illustration 39 is worthy of notice as a specimen of well-finished early animal carving. Except for geese and peacocks, birds are rare. The most beautiful figure of a pair of peacocks is seen in the terracotta plaque noticed before. The flying

33. A.R.A.S.I., 1926-37, p. 59.

34. J.A.S.B., No I, 1855, p. 2.

35. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 98.

36. A.R.A.S.I., 1927-28, p. 44; S. Kataki: Ancient Remains at Singri in Darrang, J.A.R.S. IV, pp. 93-95.

37. A.R.A.S.I., 1926-37, p. 58.

38. See No. 1088 in the Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1913-14.

39. A.R.A.S.I., 1923-24, pp. 80-81.

geese on the door-jamb at Dah Parbatiya with their long necks stretched forward are remarkable for their naturalness of pose.

Animals as symbolism play a great part in Hindu plastic art. According to the texts, various animals symbolise different gods and goddesses. The animals used as symbols were always conventional, and conventionalisation was always welcome to the designers of decorative art. The artists, therefore, even in dealing with animals with whose real habits they were familiar, did not hesitate to follow the texts and traditions so as to make their work look symbolical rather than real. For this very reason, symbolical figures very quickly became grotesque or mythical. Among these grotesque or mythical figures the *kirtimukha* (lit. glory-face) is very common. The motif, however, occurs throughout the whole history of Indian art, first as a sacred symbol, then as a mere artistic device, and latterly as an architectural *sine qua non* in a class of temple architecture.<sup>40</sup> The origin of the *Kirtimukha* is narrated in a legend in the *Skanda Purāṇa*. Jallandara, the king of *dāityas* (demons), having acquired the sovereignty of the Three Worlds, sent Rāhu as a messenger to the great Lord Śiva, who was about to wed Pārvatī, the daughter of Himalaya, to tell the great god that the "beggar Śiva" was not a worthy spouse for the beautiful princess, who was only destined to be the queen of Jallandara. As soon as Rāhu had delivered his impertinent message, there shot forth from between the eyebrows of Śiva a terrible being roaring like thunder, with a face like that of the lion, a protruding tongue, eyes burning with fire, with its strength seemed to be a second Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. As this terrible being ran to eat him up, Rāhu fled in horror and began to pray to Śiva for protection. Śiva dissuaded the terrible being from eating up Rāhu. Upon that the former complained to Śiva of a very painful hunger and asked him for the means of appeasing it. Śiva ordered him to eat up the flesh of his own hands and feet which the being forthwith did, leaving only its face intact as the only remnant of its body. Śiva was greatly pleased at this and thus addressed the terrible face : " You will be known henceforth as *kirtimukha*, and I ordain you shall remain always at my doorway. He who fails to worship you shall never acquire my grace."<sup>41</sup> Since then *kirtimukha* has had a permanent place on the doorway of Śiva's temple.

40. A note on *Kirtimukha*: Being the life history of an Indian architectural ornament. *Rupam*, No. 1, 1920.

41. *Skanda Purāṇa* (Basumatī edition), II, pp. 1182-1183.

The *kirithimukha* is, however, a very ancient motif, and is also found in China under the name of T'ao' T'ieh, "Monster face", and in the Far East under Banaspati (lit. king of the woods). H. Marchall<sup>41a</sup> following M. Chavennes considers that the origin of this motif might be in the human skull fixed as a kind of war trophy with clearly prophylactic purpose by Polynesian tribes above the entrances of their dwellings. Subsequently it was introduced in Hindu art, and interpreted under Brāhmaṇic influence as a terrible emanation of Śiva and became *kirtimukha*. In the rendering of this skull motif in the hands of the Indian artists, a commingling took place with the head of the lion, the king of beasts. The *kirtimukha* figures were greatly illustrated in the early temples of the province. They were to be found everywhere on walls, basements, pillars, and on door-lintels above entrances. In Assam, the motif had undergone various types of stylisation with a profusion of decorative elements. In most of the Assam figures, the lower jaw is absent, which naturally reminds us of their close affinity with the Khmer motif of Java. The *kirtimukhas* occurring on the coping piece of Deo Parvat are remarkably akin to the Javanese figures and provided, like the latter, with eyes-having horn-like sockets.<sup>42</sup> Figures of the *makara*, whose mouth is that of an alligator or crocodile with a tail resembling that of an animal, *suparna*, the mythical deity, half man and half bird,<sup>43</sup> and *Garuḍa* are generally met with in temple architecture.

#### 4. Sculpture of Designs

It has previously been indicated that the ordinances of the *Silpaśāstras*, which claimed a sanctity next to the Veda itself, hemmed the artists on every side, and left little room for the play of their imagination in the representations of divine and semi-divine figures. Fortunately, however, ornamentation, a major branch of the art, was left entirely to their fancy; and here they found an opportunity of giving vent to their artistic faculty leading to the development of an endless variety of decorative designs. These decorative designs may conveniently be grouped under three classes:<sup>44</sup>

41a. A. Marchall: The head of the monster in Khmer and Far Eastern decoration, *J.J.S.O.A.*, VI, pp. 97-105; Stutterheim: The meaning of the Kala-makara ornament, *Indian Art and Letters*, III, pp. 27-52.

42. *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1936-37, pp. 58.

43. *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1924-25, pp. 99.

44. H. D. Sankalia: *The Archaeology of Gujarat*, p. 116.

- (i) architectural,
- (ii) geometric,
- (iii) floral.

The *caitya*-window ornament, generally marked by the hollow portion of a temple wall, may be called an architectural design. The *caitya*-windows of two different types are seen on a lintel at Dah Parbatiya, which belonged to the sixth century A.D. One of these patterns is a trefoil in which all three arcs are of the same size, in the other the upper arc is larger than the two arcs on the sides.<sup>45</sup> The interior of the sunken panels is entirely covered with geometrical patterns with a half rosette in the centre. Slabs bearing similar designs, carved around a decorative figure, for which the figure looks as if enshrined within a pyramidal temple, are discovered throughout the province. *Gavakṣa*-type, (circular window) and perforated window and *śikhara*, are other favourite architectural designs.<sup>46</sup>

Geometrical designs are found on ceilings of shrines as well as on pillars. In his sketch of a ceiling decoration of an early temple at Tezpur, Dalton has shown the technique of this type of decoration, which is fashioned mainly by carving circles within circles.<sup>47</sup> Various geometrical designs are seen in the Dimapur and Kachamari pillars. (Fig. 29-32).

In the delineation of vegetable life the artist was in the height of his form. Combined with a considerable amount of faithful representation and integrity there is an amount of luxuriance of decoration and of picturesque arrangement. As floral ornaments could be used for any decorative purpose and any vacant space could be filled up with such devices, naturally they became varied in form and numerous in number. Of the floral designs, the lotus was by far the greatest favourite, and it was carved in various forms, in bud, in a half-open state, and in full-blown flowers. Pedestals of statues and footstools for gods and goddesses are often formed of large multi-petalled lotuses (*padmāsana*). Even ceilings of shrines bore the carving of the *viśvepadma*.<sup>48</sup> Illustration (Fig. 33) from Deo Parbat is a beautiful representation of a cluster of lotuses in full bloom and appears to be issuing from a pond.

45. R. D. Banerji: *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, p. 196; A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 97

46. A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37, pp. 54ff.

47. E. T. Dalton. Notes on Assam Temple Ruins, (with plates) J.A.S.B., XXXIV 1885 pp. 1-24

48. A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37, Loc. Cit.

Another illustration from the same place exhibits a row of busts with hands holding lotuses; their *patra kundalas* were also designed like full-blown lotuses. (Fig. 34).

The great strength of the artists, however, lay in the most sumptuous floral scrolls which they designed on all their leading bands. Most of these, as we find them to-day, are winding and undulating scrolls having flowers and foliages of various kinds. Attention has previously been drawn to the scroll-work on the door-frame of Dah Paratiya. A beautifully carved slab in Cole Park, Tezpur, (Fig. 5) bears three scrolls used in combination. The extreme left scroll, in its loops formed by the stalk, encloses animals of various kinds, such as swan, horse, hog, &c. The other two scrolls are without any foliage. A splendid florid example is in the trefoil arc on black schist from Tezpur (Fig. 35). Besides the *kirtimukha* at the top and a rosette in the centre, it bears several meandering creepers, which are well marked for their diversities of style and arrangement.

### III. ICONOGRAPHY

#### 1. Śaiva Images

Speaking about the Śaiva cults, in the previous chapter, mention has been made of the existence of numerous Śaiva temples. But unfortunately a sufficient number of Śaiva images has not hitherto been found in their sites. One of the reasons for the paucity of Śaiva images is that the central object of worship in a Śaiva temple is invariably the phallic emblem or the *linga*.

The earliest representation of Śiva is seen on the panel of the Sun temple at Tezpur.<sup>49</sup> This is a two-handed image of the Iśāna aspect of Śiva standing in the *samāpada-sthānaka* pose, with an attendant in each of the side niches. A sandstone image of Śiva identified by P. D. Chaudhury as indicating the deity's Maheśa aspect is in the A. P. M.<sup>50</sup> The image is within a full-blown lotus in the *rājrāsana* pose. It has ten arms and five heads, the faces of four of which alone are visible. Two of his hands are held in *varadā* and *abhaya* poses. Nandi is represented below.<sup>51</sup>

49. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 96.

50. P. D. Choudhury: Identification of a sculpture in the Gauhati Museum. J.A.R.S., Vol. VI, pp. 101-104.

51. Seated image of Śiva with four hands and in *yoga* pose was unearthed in the ruins of Gāchtala, Nowgong District A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37 pp 55ff

The graceful image of Umā-Maheśvara (Fig. 37) represents a type of composite Śiva icon. This form of Śiva is particularly associated with some form of Tāntric worship where worshippers are to concentrate their minds on the Devī as sitting on the lap of Śiva in the *mahāpadmarava*.<sup>52</sup> In Fig. 38 Śiva is seated on the right, with the right leg pendent. It appears that Śiva is four-armed, though two arms are not visible. One of the right hand embraces the chin of Umā and the other holds a trident. His hair is dressed in high lops (*jaṭā-mukuta*) and the ears *patra-kundala*. Umā is seated by Śiva's side, in a corresponding position with her left leg pendent.<sup>53</sup> Another image of Umā-Maheśvara is found among the ruins of Baḍagaṅgā, Nowgong district. The image is richly decorated, and the hair of Umā is dressed in a peculiar way. Her "hair is tied upwards into a thin knot and then again flattened at the top and tied round like a big ball".<sup>54</sup>

One of the excellent *nṛtyamūrtis* of Śiva was found near Gauhati, on the bank of the river Brahmaputra and is now in the collection of the Assam Provincial Museum. The image is carved on a big stone with a circular border having floral designs. Śiva as Naṭarāja is dancing on his bull. The face is mutilated; the figure appears to have ten hands.<sup>55</sup> Such a dancing image of Śiva endowed with ten hands closely follows the description given in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, which lays down the *khadga*, śakti, *dandā*, and *trisūla* should be placed in the right hands, while *khetaka*, *kapāla*, *nāga* and *khaṭvāṅga* in the left hands of the god shown on the back of his bull (*vaiśākha sthānaka*), one of the two remaining hands being in the *varadā* pose and the other holding a rosary.<sup>56</sup> In this image (Fig. 39) the left foot of Śiva rests on Nandī and the right is raised in a dancing gesture. The bull is very graphically represented with a *ghaṇṭā* hanging from the neck.

Another early type of Naṭarāja *mūrti* having six hands was noticed by Banerji in the ruins Bamuni Hill.<sup>57</sup> A four-armed image of Śiva as Tripurāri and in dancing pose, found at Deo-Parbat, is

52. *Saundarya Lahari*, v. pp. 40ff.

53. *A.R.A.S.J.*, 1924-25, p. 97.

54. R. M. Nath: Antiquities of the Kapili and the Yamunā Valleya. *J.A.R.S.*, V. p. 42.

55. Dikshit notices a ten-handed Śiva on a stone slab in a private residence at Gauhati (*Annual Report, Eastern Circle*, 1917-18, p. 50) and an interesting image of a four-handed Śiva holding a *damaru*, trident, *gadā* and rosary by his hands and flanked by female attendants, *Ibid.*, 1920-21, pp. 37-38.

56. Chap. 259, v. 4.

57. *A.R.A.S.J.*, 1925-26, p. 116.

now at the A.P.M. The image, in its two main hands, holds bow and arrow. A tiara is seen on the head while circular *patra-kundalas* adorn the ears.<sup>58</sup>

An interesting figure of Śiva as Lakuliśa is found carved on a *caitya*-window in the ruins of Dah Parbatiya, Tezpur.<sup>59</sup> Lakuliśa is usually represented as seated on *padmāsana*, with penis erect and a *mātūringa* (citron fruit) in the right hand and a staff in the left.<sup>60</sup> Our Lakuliśa is a seated figure with a rope tied round his leg. A female is holding a cup to his left while another stands to his right.

The composite image of Śiva-Viṣṇu (Harihara) which suggests the cordial relation between the Śaiva and Viṣṇu cults from North Gauhati, and now in the A. P. M., is a unique piece of sculpture. The figure has two attendants, one on each side. The right part of the deity has the emblem of Śiva, namely the *trishula*, and the *damaru*. The left side represents Viṣṇu with his *karanḍamukuta*, and holding the *gadā* and *cakra* in his two hands. The image is lavishly ornamented.

In his *ugra* (terrible) aspect, Śiva is usually known as Bhairava. Hemādri describes him as possessing a grim face with open teeth, a pot-belly, a garland of skulls and serpents as ornaments. He has plaited hair and several hands.<sup>61</sup> The four-armed image of Bhairava in Fig. 40 is shown without garments, with a flabby belly, long skull-garland and flames issuing out of his head. He is standing on a prostrated body. All these attributes give the god a ferocious form under which he is worshipped by a sect of devotees known as *Aghora-panthī*.

So far we have been discussing the various forms of Śiva under which he is worshipped by the devotees. But there have been found sculptural representations illustrating some mythological episodes associated with Śiva. The A. P. M. contains a sculpture which depicts the story of Śiva's killing the demon Andhakāsura. Andhakāsura by his penance obtained several boons from Brahmā, and thus becoming very powerful, harassed the gods. The gods requested Śiva to rescue them from the tyranny of this powerful demon. Śiva thereupon fought with the Asura and wounded him with his *trishula*. But each drop of blood that fell from the body of the demon assumed a new shape, and thus there arose a thousand of Andhakāsuras to fight against Śiva. But Śiva,

58. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

59. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 99.

60. A.R.A.S.I., 1906-7, pp. 185-6.

61. Bhattacharya, *Indian Images*, pp. 20-21.

realising this, immediately thrust his *triśūla* through the body of the real Andhakāsura, and held a skull to collect the blood flowing down the Asura's body. The whole theme is well illustrated in the image. Śiva is shown with four hands, in two of which he bears a *triśūla* at the end of which is pinned the body of Andhakāsura ; the left lower hand holds the *kapāla*. The third eye is prominent.

The images of Gaṇeśa and Kārtika, as both of these gods are intimately associated with Śiva, are to be discussed along with the Śaiva icons. Though a son of Śiva and a member of the Śaiva group of deities, Gaṇeśa has become almost non-sectarian and all sects agree in doing him honour as "the bestower of success" (*siddhidātā*) and "the remover of obstacles" (*vighneśvara*).<sup>62</sup>

It is one of the reasons why his figure stands over the house doors and on niches and entrances of temples. He is also considered to be the guardian deity of the village, and as such, his image is installed in one of the four quarters of almost every village. Many rock-cut figures of Gaṇeśa are to be seen on the bank of the Brahmaputra, particularly near the bathing ghats.<sup>63</sup>

There are various types of Gaṇeśa images such as seated, standing and dancing. In most cases the god is usually sculptured as four-handed, holding in his hands a lotus, his own tusk, a battle-axe and ball of rice-cake, and having three eyes. The figure of Gaṇeśa carved in a shallow niche at Vasundhārī, Nowgong district, is interesting. (Fig. 42). Over the top is a *kirtimukha* with the pearl necklace issuing out of its mouth. The head of the god is adorned with a matted hair dress (*jaṭā-jūṭa*), he has lotus buds on his ears as ornaments, and holds in his hands a blue lotus (*utpalā*), axe, rosary, and eatables, swallowing the last with his trunk. The mouse, his *vāhana*, is depicted below the foot.<sup>64</sup> The dancing Gaṇeśa is a fairly popular theme in the eastern Indian school of architecture.<sup>65</sup> The figure of the four-armed Gaṇeśa on the wall of the Kāmākhyā temple, dancing on his rat, which looks up to the god, is a well-known and popular representation of the deity. (Fig. 43).

62. The legends connected with Vighneśvara are summarised by Getty in *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 5-9.

63. Dikshit places the rock cut figure of Gaṇeśa at the landing ghat between Chummary and the Mission Mounds at Tezpur to the 9th-10th century A.D. A.R.A.S.I., 1929-30 p. 14.

64. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1920-21, pp. 39 ff.

65. S. K. Sarasvati, Dancing Gaṇeśa, C.R. LXVI, pp. 77-80. Getty : *Gaṇeśa*, pp. 38ff.

Kumāra or Kārtikeya is another son of Śiva. Being brought up by the six mothers, the Krūikās (Pleiads) he is called Kārtikeya. He is also regarded as a guardian deity, and an annual festival, Kārtika Pujā, is celebrated in his honour both in Assam and Bengal. Images of the god, however, are rare. Illustration 71 shows him on his usual vāhana, the *mayūra* (peacock), holding in his hands a staff and a bow.

## 2. Śakti Images

Assam was the centre of Śakti worship, and various forms of Śāktism were prevalent in the province during different periods of history. Naturally there evolved a variety of Devi images associated with different Śakti cults.

One of the early finds of Devī images is the Deopani image of Durgā noticed by Bloch in his *Annual Report* for 1905.<sup>66</sup> It is a large figure (5 feet 10 inches high) of a standing four-armed Caṇḍī. The goddess has four hands, the two lower arms are in the *varadā-mudrā*. Of the two upper ones, the right hand holds a trident, and the left one a mirror. On each side of the goddess stands a small worshipping female, holding the hands with the palms joined together in front of the breast, the usual attitude of supplication. Above these are small figures of Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya. Figures of Pārvatī are found on many temple walls. A fine sculpture in a private residence at Gauhati represents Pārvatī with a sword in her right hand and a mirror in her left.<sup>67</sup>

The commonest variety of the Devī image is the Mahiṣamardini group. In most of the Devī temples erected during the Ahom rule, the goddess is worshipped under this popular iconic form. A large figure of Mahiṣamardini is seen in the idol of the Hatimura temple, Nowgong.<sup>68</sup> The goddess is represented with slender waist, broad breasts, ten hands, and holding different weapons in each hand. She is seen placing her right foot on the lion, and pressing the shoulder of the buffalo-demon with her left. She pierces the trident through the body of the demon, and has fastened his arm with a noose. To put her weight on the Asura, the goddess is slightly bent to the left. The lion is also represented

66. Also *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1923-24, pp. 81-82.

67. *Annual Report, Eastern Circle*, 1920-21. The figures of the goddess noticed by Dalton are in the ruins of a temple near Dibrugarh, *J.A.S.B.*, 1855, p. 22.

68. The present Hatimura temple, Silghat, was probably built on old ruins in the Śaka year 1687 (1745-6 A.D.) in the reign of King Pramatta Sinha.

attacking the demon. The whole composition of the goddess is as given in the texts.<sup>69</sup>

Another fierce form of the Devī, popular among a certain sect of the Tāntric worshippers, is of Cāmuṇḍā. Here the figure of Cāmuṇḍā from Kāmākhyā (Fig. 49) is described. She is fearful with protruding teeth, long tongue, erect hair, emaciated body, sunken eyes, and withered belly. Her pedestal is carved with ghosts, riding on whose shoulders she roams over the earth. She holds a trident in one hand, and a skull or a cup in the other. Another figure of Cāmuṇḍā is from Na-Bhangā, Nowgong (Fig. 50). The image is terrible to look at, the appearance is grim, the figure is emaciated, the bones of the chest are exposed, the eyes are sunken into their sockets, the abdomen is shrivelled and the mouth is wide agape. Human skulls are laced round the matted hair-lock, waist and neck. The goddess is seated on a corpse; on the right side is a vulture and on the left is a jackal. Further below are a skull and a few bones.<sup>70</sup> This uncanny figure is iconographically remarkable as it is a rare type.

### 3. Image of Brahmā

Although he was a member of the Hindu Trinity, no independent religious cult evolved out of Brahmā, and no temple was set up exclusively for his worship. Nevertheless, images of Brahmā adorn the walls, ceilings and niches of many Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite temples. In an image preserved in the A.P.M., Brahmā is shown with eight hands. Here (Fig. 52) Brahmā is seen seated on a *padmāsana* in a yogic posture. A swan below the seat is shown paying him homage. The palm of one of the lower left hands exhibits the *varadā mudrā*, while one of the right hands indicates *abhaya*. One right hand holds the sacrificial ladle and the other left holds the sacrificial spoon. The panel from the Sun temple, Tezpur, also bears a standing figure of Brahmā with an attendant on each side. He has a long beard and wears a long conical cap.<sup>71</sup>

In another image now in the A.P.M. Brahmā is seen standing on a pedestal decorated with lotus buds and a swan. He has *jaṭā-mukuṭa* and the *yajñopavīta*. He has four faces, of which three are seen in the icon, and four hands; the two lower hands are broken. The upper right hand holds a *sruk*.

69. K. L. Barua assigns it to the 9th-10th century A.D. Vide, Hati-mura temple in Nowgong, J.A.R.S., II, p. 12.

70. R. M. Nath: Ruins of Na-Bhangā, J.A.R.S., VIII, 1941, pp. 35-37.

71. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 96.

and the left a *śrīva*. On both sides of the image stand two female figures, and at the top there is a *kirtimukha*. Flying *vidyādhara*s are also seen on the two sides.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4. Image of Sūrya

The prevalence of the Sūrya cult in the province has already been noted. From the evidence of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa it may be said that Sūrya was worshipped not only for attainment of welfare and desire, but also for removal of disease.<sup>73</sup> Several images of Sūrya have been unearthed in different parts of the province. The earliest of these images is seen in the ruins of the Sūrya temple at Tezpur. The central panel of an enormous lintel ( $10' 3'' \times 1' 8''$ ) at Tezpur is occupied by a figure of Sūrya with two attendants (Fig. 36). The date of the icon may possibly go back to the 8th century A.D., if not earlier.<sup>74</sup>

Illustration 53 presents more or less similar features to the Sukreśvara Sūrya, Gauhati. The deity is standing and carries a full-blown lotus with stalk in each of his two hands. He has as ornaments *kirīṭa-mukuṭa*, *Kuṇḍalas*, *hāras*, girdle, and *uttariya-vāstra* in the form of a long garment. He wears boots, and the sacred thread is very prominent. But the horse and the chariot are absent. It is, however, not easy to say whether the female figures at his sides should be regarded as his consorts, (Saṅgā and Chāyā), or attendants. In point of style and execution these images appear to date in the 9th century A.D., having general resemblance to the Sūrya image found in a field near Sundia, in the 24 Parganas district in Bengal.<sup>75</sup>

A naive carved image of Sūrya was found near Sadiya. Here the deity is seen in a chariot drawn by seven horses<sup>76</sup> (Fig. 55).

#### 5. Viṣṇuite Images

It appears that Viṣṇu is the most popular god of the Hindu Triad. Viṣṇu in his various forms is not only worshipped in temples especially set up for him, but he also finds an important

72. Vide S. Kataki: The Discovery of Three Stone Images at Gauhati: J.A.R.S., IX, 1912, pp. 88-92. According to Dikshit this is one of the best known images of Brahmā. Block in his Annual Reports of the Archaeological Department, Bengal Circle, for the years 1903 to 1905, also refers to a statue of Brahmā.

73. *Supra*, Chap. VI.

74. A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, p. 96.

75. A.R.A.S.I., 1923-24.

76. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1905, p. 4.

place even in the Śaiva and Śākta shrines. The four-handed *sthānaka* images of Viṣṇu are the commonest among those discovered in the province. As a cult image, it carries in its hands śāṅkha, cakra, gadā and padma. These images of Viṣṇu are differentiated into twenty-four forms by the varying order in which the four hands hold these four attributes.<sup>77</sup>

The earliest image of Viṣṇu was the standing sculpture of Deopani in the A.P.M. (Fig. 56) and first noticed by Bloch in the *Annual Report* of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1904-5. The pedestal inscription tells us that it is an image of Nārāyaṇa. On palaeographic ground as well as in consideration of its execution, Dikshit considers it to be of the 9th century A.D. He further observes that the expression of the face and the treatment of the lower lip and the crown are characteristic of the late Gupta sculpture. The right hand and the feet of the image are broken, and the halo behind the head is lost. The left upper hand holds the conch and the left lower the mace. Viṣṇu has all the usual ornaments, the *kaustubha* and *śrivatsa* symbols, *yajñopavita*, and *vanamālā* reaching to the knees.<sup>78</sup> Another Viṣṇu image of the period is the mutilated standing figure in black basalt in the A.P.M. (Fig. 57). In the back right hand it holds the *gadā*, the back left hand the *cakra* (?), and in the front right and left hands the *padma* and the *śaṅkha* respectively. Viṣṇu carrying attributes in this manner is considered to be a special form of Trivikrama.

A standing Viṣṇu in the *samabhaṅga* pose is noticed among the ruins of Gosain-Juri, Nowgong district. The image wears a high *kirīṭa-mukuta* on the head, flattened *patra-kuṇḍalas* in the ears, and two necklaces, one with the *kaustubha* pendant attached to it on the neck. The upper hands are missing, as is also the lower left hand; while the lower right is in the *varadā* pose holding a lotus. The *vanamālā* is arranged as in the Deopani image, with which, both in decorative arrangement and facial type, the present image seems to be related and coeval. Śrī and Sarasvatī stand on *tribhaṅga*, the former to the right and the latter to his left, both wearing conical *kirīṭa-mukutas*, flattened *patra-kuṇḍalas*, a single necklace with pendant between the breasts, *aṅgadas*, and wristlets. Śrī holds rosaries in her hands while Sarasvatī indicates *abhaya* or protection with her right hand and holds in her left a lyre. Another fragmentary sculpture of standing Viṣṇu is seen in the same ruins. The figure has a halo with a dentil edge which bears

77. Vidyavinoda : Varieties of Viṣṇu Images, A.S.M., No. 2, 1920.

78. A.R.A.S.I., 1923-24, p. 22; E.I., Vol. XVIII, 1925, pp. 329-30.

a carving of a hovering *vidyādhara* with scarf held in hands in the ethereal region indicated by a circle with indented edges as in the Pāla sculptures of Bengal.<sup>79</sup>

The standing four-handed bronze figure of Viṣṇu (Fig. 58) originally hailing from Dibrugarh and now in the A.P.M. is of unique iconographic interest. The image is peculiar in that there is no object held in any of the four hands, all of which are in the *tribhāṅga* pose (bent at the elbow and wrist joint) and the *kartarī-mudrā* (the attitude in which the index and little fingers point outwards and the middle and ring fingers are tucked in). The throne on which the god stands has parrots at the four corners (technically called a *bhadrāsana*). The deity wears a close-fitting loin cloth, crocodile-shaped ear-ornaments (*makara-kundala*), a *mukuta* and sandals. Of the two female attendants, the one on the right holds a bud and a dagger (?) and the one on the left has her hands in a peculiar dancing mode. Probably the former was intended to represent Laxmī and the latter Sarasvatī. But the absence of any of the other regular attributes of Viṣṇu makes it difficult to hazard this identification with confidence. The image is a fine specimen of the Assamese bronze art of the 11th-12th century A.D.<sup>80</sup>

The āsana and śayana images of Viṣṇu are also not rare. The black basalt partially damaged composite figure of Viṣṇu in the *yogāsana* pose (Fig. 60) is an excellent piece of sculpture and is perhaps the only known specimen of this particular type of *yogāsana-mūrti* of Viṣṇu. According to the text the *yogāsana* variety of Viṣṇu is a seated figure on a *padmāsana* with four hands, and a *karaṇḍa-mukuta* on the head.<sup>81</sup> The front hands of the image are in *yoga-mudrā*, and the eyes are slightly closed. The hands of the present figure are damaged; so it is not possible to ascertain what were the attributes in them. But in other details the icon conforms to the description of the *yogāsana* variety of Viṣṇu. The image is surrounded by a *prabhāmaṇḍala* with flaming rays (which resemble creepers or ornamentation) proceeding outwards. Outside the *prabhāmaṇḍala*, on the four corners, are the figures of āvaraṇa ḍeratās, namely, Mahiṣamardini, Kārtikeya (?), Gaṇeśa and a cross-legged *puruṣa*. Garuḍa is seen sculptured below the *padmāsana*. The presence of Gaṇeśa and Mahiṣamardini on the right

79. *Ibid.*

80. A.R.A.S.I., 1923-24, p. 80.

81. *Ran.* Vol. I, pt. I, pp. 85 ff.

leads to the inference that the idea was to depict Viṣṇu in the centre of the five gods (*pañcadevatā*).<sup>82</sup>

The rock-cut sculptures on the cliff by the Brahmaputra behind the Śukreśvara temple, Gauhati, with Viṣṇu as the central figure, deserve to be known better. This large image (height 6' 5") is known as Viṣṇu Janārdana (Fig. 61) though the disposition of the attributes in the hands indicates that the Nārūyaṇa form of the image was intended. The deity is represented here seated with crossed legs in the *vajra-paryanika* mudrā. The image of Sūrya and Gaṇeśa to the right and the figures of Śiva in the ascetic form and the ten-handed Dūrgā to the left form a *pañcāyatana* (group of five principal deities) with the presiding central image of Viṣṇu. The sculptures carved on rocks at the Urbaśī Island, Gauhati, show that the worshippers there followed all the principal Hindu gods, as we find representations there of Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Śiva and Devī (with a scorpion as emblem) in addition to those of Viṣṇu and his ten incarnations.<sup>83</sup> An image from Numaligarh shows Viṣṇu seated in *rājalilā* (royal ease) pose on a *padmāsana*, having four hands, the upper hands with mace and conch, and the lower right in *upadeśa-mudrā*, while the lower left holds a rosary. Ring-like *kundalas* adorn his ears.<sup>83a</sup>

Another interesting variety of Viṣṇu is Vāsudeva seated upon the serpent Ādiśeṣa. The deity is made to stand under a canopy of eight serpent hoods. Both the legs of the deity are folded, and made to rest on the coiled body of the serpent. The back hands hold *gadā* and *padma* and the front hands *cakra* and *śāṅkha*. (Fig. 62).

The *Anantaśayin* Viṣṇu in the Asvakrānta temple, North Gauhati, is a reclining statue of wonderful workmanship.<sup>84</sup> As laid down in the texts, a tortoise, a frog, and a piece of water weed are shown supporting the Ananta upon which Viṣṇu is seen reclining. Of his four arms, the lower left is thrown on the body of the serpent, while the lower right is stretched along the right thigh. The four-faced Brahmā is depicted as sitting on the lotus which has sprung out from the navel of Viṣṇu. Devī or Mahāmāyā and the two demons Madhu and Kaitabha, are standing on the one corner. Two rows of Nāga-kanyās, one on the space between the coil of the serpent, are seen kneeling down on his feet with

82. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 180.

83. *Annual Report, Eastern Circle*, 1917-18, p. 51; 1920-21, p. 37.

83a. *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1936-37, Plate XVIII, fig. (h).

84. Gurdon: *Asvakrānta*, near Gauhati, *J.R.A.S.*, Vol. XXXII, 1920, pp. 25-27.

folded hands. The scene is surrounded by an arc-type *prabhā-mandala*, and the entire carvings appear to be sculptures of high artistic excellence.<sup>85</sup>

Images of different incarnations of Viṣṇu have been discovered from various parts of the province. The figures of *avatāras* are usually depicted on stone slabs decorating the walls of temples. Among these independent figures, generally met with are those of Varāha and Narasiṁha.<sup>86</sup> The best specimen of the Bhū-varāha incarnation is in the Fig. 63. In this figure Viṣṇu appears with the face of a boar and the body of a man. The boar face is slightly raised up. The right leg is bent a little, and probably made to rest on the head of the serpent Ādiśeṣa.

The Narasiṁha incarnations are depicted in several forms, of which *yoga* and *ugra* are the main. Illustration 64 shows an *ugra* type. The long manes of the lion-head and profuse ornamentation are worthy of notice. It has four hands; the two back ones are thrown up almost vertically; the front ones piercing Hiranyaśākhu who is lying on his thigh. In another figure, partially damaged, the deity is shown standing on a *pādmāsana*; the demon is being disembowelled on his thigh.<sup>87</sup> A relief from Kāmākhya depicts Viṣṇu killing Madhu.

Besides sculptural representations on the temple walls, a few independent images of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have also been found.<sup>88</sup> It may be noted that the cult of Rāma was established in the province at an early age.<sup>89</sup> The entire Rāmāyaṇa was translated into Assamese as early as in the thirteenth century A.D.<sup>89a</sup> Unlike other *avatāras*, Rāma is represented in sculpture as a royal personage of bewitching beauty. A frieze from the Deoparbat ruins, Golaghat, already referred to, shows Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.<sup>90</sup>

85. Different varieties of Viṣṇu images are noticed at Terpur (A.R.A.S.J., 1922-23, p. 120), Nowgong (J.R.A.S., Vol. V, 1937; Vol. VIII) and Golaghat (A.R.A.S.J., 1936-37).

86. Among the carvings in the outside walls of the shrine of Hayagrīva at Hajo is a figure which is believed to be of Buddha *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Annual Report, Bengal Circle, 1930, p. 18.

87. The principal image of the Hayagrīva temple at Hajo is a statue of the Man-Lion Incarnation of Viṣṇu. It is now worshipped as Mahāmuni or Buddha by the Buddhists coming from Bhutan and Tibet. Annual Report, Bengal Circle, 1903, p. 18. Westmacott noticed an image of Matsya Avatāra in the ruins at Chardwar in Assam. J.A.S.B. IV (1935), p. 195.

88. A.R.A.S. I, 1925-26, p. 116.

89. Martin refers to a temple dedicated to Rāma at Kalabā, Dhubri; Eastern India, III, p. 473.

89a. B. K. Barua, Assamese Literature, p. 12.

90. A.R.A.S. I, 1936-37, p. 50.

A fine specimen of Muralidhara or Venugopāla Krṣṇa is seen on the western gateway of the Kāmākhyā temple. (Fig. 66). A single necklace of maṇis and an undergarment with central and lateral tassels adorn his body. He wears a conical cap, which is in the shape of flames. The figure seems to be a rare specimen of anatomical perfection.<sup>91</sup> Another early figure of Muralidhara Krṣṇa playing on a flute and flanked by two damsels is noticed by Westmacott in the temple ruins of Chardwar.<sup>92</sup>

Of the goddesses associated with the Viṣṇu-Krṣṇa cult, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are the most important ones. They are generally depicted as chief attendants of the sthānaka Viṣṇu images. But separate images are also found in several localities of the province. Of the eight different forms of Lakṣmī known as Aṣṭa Mahālakṣmī, the Gaja-lakṣmī form is the popular motif in Assam. In this form, she is described as "the goddess of prosperity, standing on the lotus flower, slightly bent on account of the weight of her breast, having high hips, broad lotus-like eyes, and deep navel pit, dressed in white cloth, and bathed by heavenly elephants from golden pots which are bedecked with a variety of jewels, and holding lotuses in her hands". An image of Gaja-Lakṣmī conforming to this description is at present in the collections of the A.P.M. But the earliest representation of the Devī known locally as Kamala Kāminī is discovered in the niche of a stone slab from Tezpur, in which two elephants pour water over the head of the goddess from vases held in their trunks.<sup>93</sup>

A figure of Viñāhastā Sarasvatī (Fig. 67) as described in the Agni Purāṇa is seen in a niche of a stone slab found at Tezpur.<sup>94</sup> Another figure of the goddess in tribhaṅga attitude was recovered from Sibsagar. (Fig. 68). She wears a ratna kundala, hāra, girdles and anklets. The simplicity of the figure and the delightfully done drapery, flowing round her body, mark it out as one of the graceful specimens of the early art of Assam.<sup>95</sup>

#### 6. Miscellaneous Divinities

Of the miscellaneous deities, frequently depicted though not as generally worshipped, are the Dikpālas, the lords of the

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

92. Description of Ancient Temples and Ruins at Chardwar in Assam, *J.A.S.B.* XL, 1835, pp.

93. *A.R.A.S.* I, 1924-25, p. 97.

94. *Ibid.*

95. A crude figure of Sarasvatī was recovered from the ruins of the Tāmreśvarī temple, Sadliya by Bloch: *Annual Report, Eastern Circle*, 1905, p. 2.

quarters. Among the Dikpālas, the figures of Indra, Agni, and Kuvera are usually seen adorning the walls and niches of temples. Indra, the lord of the east, is the chief of the Dikpālas. A large rock-cut image of Indra is seen near Pāñdughāṭa, Kamrup. He is a two-armed deity in *samabhaṅga* pose with two female attendants by his side, and his *vāhana* Airāvata, the celestial elephant below. The objects in his hands are not clearly discernible, but the right hand probably holds the thunderbolt, and the left seems to hold a lotus.<sup>96</sup> A unique figure of Indra with unusual attributes was found by Kataki, while digging a slit trench at Gauhati, near Chatrākāra temple.<sup>97</sup> The image (Fig. 72) stands on a pedestal with the figure of an elephant below. Of the two hands, the right is in the *varadā* and the left in the *abhaya-mudrā*. On the head of the deity is a canopy of five snake-hoods, and above it is the *kirtimukha*. Below the *kirtimukha* are two figures of flying *vidyādhara*s, one on each side. On each side is an attendant, a female on the right and a male on the left. As regards this extraordinary image, Dikshit remarks, "A five-hooded ornament or accompaniment is not associated either with Śiva or with Indra. The elephant on the pedestal certainly indicates the figure as Indra, and it is possible that an attempt has been made to identify Indra with Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, who is always represented with such snake hoods. In fact, the appellation Upen-dra given to Viṣṇu indicates Indra as an elder brother of Viṣṇu and thus identifiable with Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa.....the general idea which associates the attributes of Indra and Balarāma, in this figure is hinted....."<sup>98</sup>

The Assam Provincial Museum possesses a sculpture of Agni representing him with a long beard, which suggests that he is the oldest of all gods. He is in a standing erect pose and holds a *kamandalu* and *tridanda* in his two hands. He has his long sacred thread and wears a *kaupīna*, the symbol of Brāhmaṇa, the performer of *śrauta* sacrifices and *smārta* ceremonies. Kuvera is the lord of the north as well as the master of the spirits. As such, he is a popular village deity, and even to-day is worshipped under various local names.<sup>99</sup> He is generally represented as having a pot-belly and a vessel in his hand.<sup>100</sup>

96. A.R.A.S. I, 1923-24, p. 80.

97. Op. Cit., J.A.R.S. IX, pp. 88-92.

98. Ibid, p. 92

99. Supra, Chap. VI.

100. In the collection of the A.P.M.

We may now note a few sculptures which represent some minor goddesses associated with both the principal religious cults and folk-beliefs. Like the Dikpālas, these figures are also generally represented on wall, lintels and door-jambs of Śiva and Viṣṇu temples. The beautiful door-frame from Dah Parbatiya, Tezpur, bears the figure of the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā.<sup>101</sup> The divine nature of the figures is indicated by the halo behind their heads. Each goddess stands with a garland in her hands in an elegant erect posture. On the right of Gaṅgā are two females, one standing with a cāmara, and the other kneeling in front, with a flat receptacle containing flowers. A third female figure is seen with a cāmara behind. To the left of the halo is seen a Nāgī kneeling and to the right two flying geese pecking at the halo of the goddess, "a new feature in the Gupta art." In the case of Yamunā (Fig. 69) there are only two attendants on the left. Both these figures are elegantly and gracefully carved, and are fine specimens of the sculptures of the period.<sup>101a</sup>

An interesting figure of the local goddess Vasundharī (Mother Earth) comes from Vasundharī-thān, Nowgong. The image has four hands, one of which is perhaps in the vāradā pose, and another holds a lotus, while the other two hands hold uncertain objects. The goddess stands on what looks like a squatting male figure with folded hands and stretched legs.<sup>102</sup>

The goddess Manasā is still worshipped in connection with the Manasā Pūjā. She is generally identified with the sister of the serpent king Vāsuki who was married to the hermit Jarut Kāru and became the mother of Āstika, and according to the *Mahābhārata*<sup>103</sup> was to save the Nāgas from being exterminated by the snake-goddess, however, seems to occupy a somewhat indefinite position in the Brāhmaṇical pantheon. Although serpent worship was associated with Brāhmaṇic religion from a remote time,<sup>104</sup>

101. A.R.A.S. I, 1924-25, 5 pp. 98 ff.

101a. About the worship of Gaṅgā in Eastern India see A. K. Maitra: The River Goddess of Gaṅgā, *Rupam*, No. 6, 1921, pp. 2-10.

102. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1920-21, p. 39.

103. *Adi. XLV, XLVIII.*

104. Several writers like Fergusson (*Tree and Serpent Worship*) have put forward the opinion that Indian snake-worship was un-Aryan in its origin, and the Aryans adopted it from the Dasyus or the aboriginal peoples. Vogel, however, in the introduction to his *Indian Serpent-Lore* establishes the fact that serpent worship was associated with the early Indian religion, and it was unambiguously referred to in the Yajur and Atharva Vedas, p. 8.

the name of the goddess Manasā does not seem to appear in the early literature. It therefore leads one to the belief that Manasā is not a goddess with a Vedic and Purānic past, but an assimilation from outside. Professor Kshitimohan Sen suggests that Manasā obtained her semi-Sanskritised name from the South-Indian snake goddess Mañcāmmā. On this ground, Bhattachari concludes that the cult of Manasā was imported to eastern India from the south.<sup>105</sup> He, however, seems to forget the fact that snake-worship is more widely distributed and developed in more interesting forms, among the various tribes of Assam. Among the Khasis of Assam the most remarkable form of serpent-worship is that of U Thlen, a gigantic snake which demands to be appeased by the sacrifice of human victims, and for whose sake, even in recent times, murders have been committed.<sup>106</sup> In Manipur, which preserves the *Mahābhārata* tradition of being the seat of the Nāga king Citravāhana, whose daughter Citrāngadā was married to Arjuna, even at the present day, the ancestral god of the royal family is a snake called Pākhangba. The Rābhās worship a serpent-god which once dwelt in a cave and was propitiated by the annual sacrifice of a boy and a girl.<sup>107</sup>

The Hindus, however, worship it under the iconographical form of Manasā or Viśaharī, remover of poison.<sup>108</sup> In this form, the goddess is represented as a handsome female of golden colour with a snake as her *rāhana*, as well as a hood of kings of serpents over her head and body clothed in snakes.<sup>109</sup> But the standing figure in Illustration 73 recovered from Nowgong is of an unusual type. Here, the goddess is depicted on an elephant (Nāgendra). The prescribed number of snakes in an image of Manasā is usually eight. From our illustration, it is not possible to count the snake-heads, but several huge snakes are seen coiling round and spreading their hoods over her head like a canopy.

105. *Iconography of Buddhist and Brāhmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, pp. 221 ff.

106. Gurdon: *The Khasis*, pp. 98 ff., 175 ff.: *Census of India*, 1901. Assam. Pt. I. p. 49.

106a. Hodson: *The Meiteis*, pp. 100 ff.

107. *Census of India*, 1911. Assam, Pt. I. p. 145.

108. *An Alphabetical List of Feasts and Holidays of the Hindus and Muhammedans*, p. 57.

109. *Iconography of Buddhist and Brāhmanical sculptures in the Dacca Museum*. pp. 212-227.

The *Manasā Pujā*, which is celebrated during the rainy months, *Jaiṣha*, *Āśadha*, *Śrāvana* and *Bhādra*,<sup>110</sup> is a popular festival in Assam, especially in the districts of Kamrup and Darrang. In these festivals, offerings are generally made to her without any image being made. The festival lasts for two or three days, in which songs connected with Chānd Sadāgar are recited.<sup>111</sup>

### 7. General Remarks : Aesthetic Achievements

The above review gives an idea of aesthetic achievement which the people of Assam attained during this period. It should, however, be borne in mind that under the present circumstances, due to paucity of available specimens, it is hardly possible to write a complete and chronological history of Assamese sculpture except in its barest outline. Further, as we have no dated image, when exactly fine art began in Assam is also not easy to determine. We may, of course, say with some certainty that it began at a fairly early period. In the carvings of Tezpur, archaeologists have traced definite early Gupta influence. The exquisite door-frame of Dah Parbatiya, an excellent specimen of the Pīṭaliputra school, though not connected with any dated inscription, has been unambiguously proved by Banerji as of Gupta. Other stone sculptures and rock carvings that have been discovered at different places not only indicate the geographical limit of the circulation of art specimens and the spread of Hindu culture into the remotest corner of the province, but also fully reveal how closely Assam followed the general art tradition and motifs of Northern India. Dikshit, therefore, rightly observes that "the affinity of Assamese art would seem to lie more with the schools of Bihar and Orissa than with the

110. Another Chapter on Assam, C.R., XXI, p. 413. It is to be noted that during these rainy months, the snakes, driven out of their holes by the water, seek a refuge in the dwellings of men. At that time of the year the danger of snakes is greatest, so it is natural that the rite should be performed in these months. See Vogel, p. 11.

111. This long poem which is popular both in Eastern Bengal and Assam, preserves in a somewhat legendary form, the account of the spread of the *Manasā* cult in Eastern India. Chānd Sadāgar was a merchant who refused to worship the snake-goddess *Manasā*, for which he lost all his sons, being bitten by snake except the youngest son Lakhindar. He got Lakhindar married to Behulā ; but in the very night after the wedding, Lakhindar was bitten by a snake, in spite of all precautions taken by Chānd. Behulā, however, did not allow her father-in-law to cremate the body of her husband. She procured a raft and placing the body on it, got into it herself and had it cast adrift on the river. After many vicissitudes, she propitiated Śiva, and through his mediation persuaded her father-in-law to make offerings to *Manasā* whereupon *Manasā* restored her husband to life.

contemporary Pāla art of Bengal."<sup>112</sup> This, of course, is not unnatural, as of the streams of influence that have moulded the culture of Assam, the strongest current has always been from Mid-India.

It is true that in comparison with the number of sculptures discovered in other parts of India, the art specimens from Assam are few. But even the few that have come down to us as chance finds are sufficient to convince us of the beauty, dignity and grace of the Assamese art, and thus give them a distinctive place in the art history of India.

From the twelfth century, however, there seems to appear marked provincial characteristics in Assamese art. During this period, Tāntric rituals began to dominate the Brāhmaṇic religion, and the Mongoloid infiltration influenced the culture of the population. The Tāntric influence is best seen in the horrid figures of Bhairava and Cāmunda. The other influence can be traced in the figures having high cheek-bones and flat noses, both being the Mongoloid ethnic peculiarities. Herein, however, for the first time, we find the rebirth of the provincial or national art language, arising out of the traditional Indian and indigenous local conceptions. This fusion does not necessarily lead to senseless, accidental results, but presents a selection of those elements from the old traditional art that can serve as the expression of things already living in the artists, and which can satisfy the requirements of a new national soul.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in the pages of this book to describe the cultural development of ancient Assam in different phases. Chapters have been devoted to show how from the early Christian eras till the 12th-13th century A.D. the politics, social system, religion and the fine arts of Assam grew and developed. In the very first place it should be noted that as now even in earlier times Assam was predominantly an agricultural country, and land was the sole possession of men. A considerable information is therefore, found in this book on types of land, ownership, land tenure and revenue and burden on land. It might be admitted that much of the land and revenue systems have parallels in North India. Even here our inscriptions point out certain distinctive features which are not to be found in the earlier records of other provinces. These have, therefore, some value as material for the ancient history of India.

Agriculture being the chief occupation of the people, the civilisation of Assam has tended to centre round villages. This is one reason why so few cities are mentioned in our early records, the capital being the metropolis. Large palaces, stone constructions and heavy buildings were not made on any considerable scale. The Assamese people had very little to do with stones. The rural population built their houses with easily available materials, such as clay, brick, bamboo, reeds and timber. Palaces and temples of a later age, the age of the Ahom rulers, were all made of brick. Clay was not simply a building material, it was used in making utensils, play-things, musical instruments and even decorative figures on the faces of temples.

Because most of the people lived in villages, therefore the villages were sought to be made self-contained and kept well supplied with requisites from the outside world. Materials on the way how the villages were laid out, how the population was disposed, what the occupations of the different sections of the people were, what the nature of the crafts as well as the different agricultural produces had been, are gathered in this book from various sources. It is felt that all these informations have been able to reconstruct a picture of the rural life of ancient Assam.

It is a common assumption that Assam is Pāñdava-varjita, that is, a country not visited by the Pāñdavas, and so untouched by the

civilising contact of the Aryans. The various chapters of the present work should be able to dispel this misconception. Assam had contacts with India since Mauryan times; in the Gupta age these contacts became stronger. The manner in which the Assam kings made an attempt to consolidate their political power shows how they imitated the Gupta expansionist measures. Bhāskaravarman not only took part in pan-Indian political affairs but also attempted to have suzerainty admitted on an all India basis. There is no reason to deny the statement of the Nepal inscription that the influence of Śri Harṣadeva crossed the bounds of Assam and spread over Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. These instances illustrate that the political outlook of Assam kings was not limited to their immediate domain but was to some extent pan-Indian.

In the matters of trade and commerce also Assam had from very early times close relations with India. Commodities like silk and *aguru* had a ready market in India as well as outside. There were trade relations with Tibet, Burma and the South of China. The Indian trade route to northern Mongolia lay through Assam. As a frontier province Assam did not have to maintain an exclusive existence, rather there were frequent exchanges with other zones of India in matters of economy and culture. For this very reason the standard of life in Assam had come to an all-India level.

In the spheres of social life and religion there were relations with India. Assam's social system was moulded primarily on the *varṇa* system. But because Assam is a border region and its relations are mostly with Kirāta or Mongoloid peoples, the Aryanised social form and the Vedic customs and rites do not adhere to any rigid pattern. For the same reasons the number of Brāhmaṇas here is small and its influence not dominant and further racial discrimination or the caste system is not rigid. Many new castes which had no precedent in the Hindu social hierarchy cropped up of this contact with non-Aryan peoples. It should not be missed that it is here that a large number of men were brought under the process of Aryanisation.

The fundamental streams of the Brahmanical religion had penetrated into Assam at an early period. Śaivism, Śaktism and Vaiśnavism held sway in various forms. These cults underwent certain modifications in Assam. It is true especially of Śaktism. It has already been observed that though Saktism is not the child of Assam even it is here that this cult had nourishment. Winteritz remarks that from the 8th century onwards Tāntrism proceeded from this territory in veritable triumph to Tibet and China.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, p. 400.

Most of the customs which came to be absorbed by the Tāntric or ritualistic side of the Śākta and Śaiva cults were taken from the soil of Assam. As a frontier region Assam appears to be a veritable asylum for all kinds of uncanny beliefs and superstitions. Since early times the province happened to be a meeting ground of the Austric, Dravidian, Aryan and Sino-Tibetan speakers, and thus the aboriginal beliefs, cults, and myths of these diverse races and tribes mingled together as if in a witch-cauldron and formed the foundation of the orthodox religion of the Tantras. For these reasons, Assam in the mediaeval period became a fertile soil for the Tāntric worship. Of the four *pīṭhas* or sacred places, namely Kāmākhyā, Śrīhaṭṭa, Purṇagiri and Uḍḍiyāna associated with Buddhist Tāntric worship and mentioned in the *Sādhanamālā*, two, namely, Kāmākhyā and Śrīhaṭṭa belonged to Assam. Dr. Bhattacharya even wants to locate Uḍḍiyāna in the western part of the province. The custom of human sacrifice in the worship of the goddess Kāmākhyā and of the Tāmreśvarī Devi was a special feature of ancient Assamese religious life. To prove the validity of this ritualistic trend were written books like the *Kālikā Purāṇa*. Dr. S. K. Chatterji even finds resemblances between the Vedic *Śūla-gavya* sacrifice and the Ao Nāgā *mithan* sacrifice; the animal was killed in each by means of a sharp stake of wood piercing its heart. Dr. Chatterji further holds that there was a likelihood of the Aryan speaking followers of the Vedic religion and the Mongoloids with their primitive religion influencing each other in certain aspects of their religious and social life. The elaborate nature of later Vedic age sacrifices where sheep, goats, cows or oxen and horses were killed, sacrifices which took up days and in which the householder and his wife had to take part in the strictly ordered sequence of the ceremonial, show a strange agreement in both form and spirit with the elaborate ceremonial of 'the feasts of merit' like the 'bull-killing' sacrifice and the '*mithan*' or wild bison-killing sacrifice as is still in use among the Ao Nāgās. The resemblances between the Vedic *Śūla-gavya* sacrifice and the Ao Nāgā *mithan* sacrifice are indeed striking; the animal was killed in each by means of a sharp stake of wood piercing its heart.<sup>2</sup>

The beliefs which were under the names of Vajrayāna and Mantrayāna and which grew up as a result of fusion of Hinduism and Buddhism, some scholars maintain, had their birth in Assam. From Assam these cults spread to places like Tibet, Bhutiyas (Buddhists of the neighbouring Bhoṭa Hills) even today

2. Kirāta-Jana-Kṛti, J.R.A.S.B., Vol. XXV, No. 2, 1950, p. 181.

came to Assam to worship the Hindu-Buddhist god Haya-griva at the Mādhava temple Hajo.

It has been mentioned in earlier chapters that in India sculpture, fine arts and literature are closely connected with religion. It is religion which fostered the growth of temples and images. In Assam also temple building and the arts of architecture and sculpture grew hand in hand with the spread of religion. Not much has been done to bring to light these aspects of Assamese culture. It is also admitted that barring a few exceptions Assam did not have sky-soaring temples. This might be partially owing to a feeling that the land was frequently subject to the devastations of earthquakes. What few relics of ancient temples have come to light show that Assam studied the principles of the *Silpa-sāstras* and followed the pan-Indian style of architecture and sculpture. Though faint the clear stream of the architectural and sculptural designs of the Pataliputra and the Gupta schools can be traced in the earlier temples of Assam. K. N. Dikshit writing on the source of the inspiration of ancient Assamese art remarks, "The affinities of Assamese art would seem to lie more with the schools of Bihar and Orissa than with the contemporary Pāla art of Bengal". "This is", according to Dikshit, "not unnatural, as of the streams of influence that have moulded the culture of Assam, the strongest current has always been from North Bihar and Mid-India".<sup>3</sup>

As a bearer of the Indian civilisation the Sanskrit language had an importance which was second to none. The copper-plates attest to the cultivation of this language in Assam. Sanskrit was the court language of Assam and all important documents were written in that language. The kings and learned persons cultivated it assiduously. The Brāhmaṇas studied the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣadas* like Brāhmaṇas of other parts of India; the common people evinced a relish for the tales of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The Assamese language itself is a transformation of the Sanskrit language. Language is the greatest bond of union among peoples of utterly different races. Assamese language has held sway over the Sino-Tibetan speaking peoples and Assamese language and literature have tended to make them Aryanised. Assam is a small unit of India but it played a most distinct and important role as a transmitter of Aryan civilisation in lands like Tibet, Nepal, and Burma. In fact, Assam is the frontier outpost of Indian civilisation.

In this book an outline only has been presented of the spread of Indian culture and civilisation to this land. Along with it an attempt has been made to point out the ways in which Assam maintained contacts with India. Assamese culture and civilisation owe not a little to the Niṣāda (Austro) and Kirāta (Sino-Tibetan) peoples. The influence of these peoples, in fact, could be discerned in the material and spiritual modes of life of all India. But that aspect of Indian civilisation does not come within the limited scope of this book.

## APPENDIX I

### *Place and Personal Names in the Early Land Grants of Assam\**

BY

B. KAKATI

1. The late Mahāmahopādhyāya Pandit Padmanātha Bhattachārya, M.A. (formerly Senior Professor of Sanskrit in the Cotton College, Gauhati) published the Sanskrit copper-plate inscriptions of the early Hindu kings of Assam in 1838 B.S. (1931 A.D.). The Pandit had compiled, deciphered and worked at the grants over many years and after his retirement from office put them in together under the comprehensive title of *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī* and got them published through the courtesy of the Rangpur Sahitya Parishad, North Bengal. The Sanskrit text has been printed in the Devanāgarī script and the accompanying Bengali translation in the Bengali script. There is also a long historical introduction in Bengali. Though the Bengali translation takes away much of the usefulness of the publication in other parts of India and abroad, the text may be relied upon as having been very carefully prepared.

2. The inscriptions have all been composed in Sanskrit—some in verse and others in prose. The Sanskrit has been interspersed with Prakrit and indigenous *dēśya* formations. Contrary to current practices, the editor, instead of retaining the Prakrit formations in the text, substituted corresponding reconstructed Sanskrit formations in their places. The original Prakritisms have however, been preserved in footnotes under headings like "Original readings".

3. In the publication under discussion, there are ten inscriptions ranging from the seventh to the twelfth century A.D., covering practically the entire Hindu period of Assam history. From the thirteenth century onwards, Assam passed into the hands of the Shans. These land grants were ordered by seven Hindu kings at different times measured by centuries. Their names, regnal times and the places wherefrom the grants were issued are given in the following table. The serial numbers of the grants are put in just after the names in Roman notation.

\* Abbreviations :—

As. = Assamese ; Bd. = Bodo ; Khaṣ = Khasi ; Md. = Mundari ; Sant. = Santali ; A. F. D. = Assamese, Its Formation and Development.

1. Bhāskara Varmā (I)		7th century	Karpasuvardha
2. Harjara Varmā (II)		9th century	Hāruppeśvara
3. Vanamāla Deva (III)		9th century	Hāruppeśvara
4. Bala Varmā (IV)		10th century	Hāruppeśvara
5. Ratnapāla (V. VI)		11th century	Durjayā
6. Indrapāla (VII. VIII)		11th century	Durjayā
7. Dharmapāla (IX. X)		12th century	Kāmarūpa (city)

4. In tracing the genealogies of kings and often also of the Brahmin scholars to whom lands were granted, in recording the names of the persons who composed the verses and who prepared the copper-plates and inscribed them, and also in defining the boundaries of the lands in terms of rivers, tanks, trees, and adjoining cultivation fields, places and persons have been named whose denominations are often of non-Sanskritic origin. The editor passed them over as unintelligible and no comment was made. In some instances an attempt was made by the editor to explain a few terms. But the explanations seem to be entirely fanciful, being metaphysical, e.g. Hāruppeśvara is connected with *sārūpya-mukti*. The explanations suggested in this paper are entirely independent of the editor's comment.

5. The indigenous *deśya* elements are grouped below into (A) Personal names—female and male; (B) Place names. The Personal names are mostly of Sanskritic origin and those only have been included here that show some morphological peculiarities from the point of view of NIA. languages. As the non-Aryan terms are unintelligible, only sound-correspondences with semantic approximations have been given.

The number of the inscription is indicated by Roman notation and the number of paragraph by Arabic notation.

### (A)

#### PERSONAL NAMES

##### *Female*

6. Female names always end in *-ā*; e.g. *Jivadā* (III.10); *Srimattarā* (III.15); *Ratnā* (IX.11); *Jivā* (X.15); *Netrā* (X.17); *Patrā* (X.19).

7. Female names are often pleonastically lengthened by suffix—*āyikā*: e.g.

*Sabhrāyikā* (III.31); *Svabhra-*; (*Su + abhra*).

*Syāmāyika* (IV.28); *Syāmā*;

*Cheppāyikā* (VI.18); *Kṣepyā*;

*Saukhyāyikā* (VII.22); \**Saukhyā*;  
*Pāukā* (IX.19); *Pāvaka + ukā*; (see § 7c.).

As against *Śyāmāyikā* of plate no. IV, occurs the honorific Skt. form *Śyāmāderi* in plate no. I.22.

In modern female names like *Rahe*, *Pate*, *Mahe* (A. F. D. § 188) in the Kāmarūpī dialect of Western Assam, convergence of *-devī* and *-āyikā* may be suspected.

*Daluhāinganā* (III.30); "women of daluha".

It is an obscure word. In the footnote the editor refers to an earlier translator who rendered it into "the women of Danuha, (a nation)." The compound seems to mean "temple women". *Daluha* seems to be an Austric formation : cf. *dol*, *haleh*, *hai*, *hei*, *hi*, H. 151, 152, 153. Modern As. retains *dol*, a temple, shrine ; *doloi*, a temple officer. Cf. also *dig-dol* (see § 16). In the context in the inscription, other classes of women referred to are *kārnātī*, *vārastri*, *pavanakānīni*, *naṭī*. The presence of *kārnātī* seems to have misled the translator.

#### Male

7. Pleonastic suffixes after male names :

(a) *-iyā* ; (A. F. D. 538a); *Kāliyā* (1.27) < *Kāli*.

It is a very common personal name in current Assamese.

(b) *-e* ; *Cande* (-*nauki*) (VI.21); a boatman named *Cande*, <*Candra-*. The suffix is the same as the Standard Assamese *-āi* (A. F. D. § 527) which appears as *-e* in Western Assamese.

(c) *-oka* ; *Khāsoka* (1.26); *Indoka* (III.32).

The termination *-oka* occurs also elsewhere: cf. *Divroka*, *Rudoka*, names of Kaivarta rebel kings of early Bengal (R. L. PAL: *Early History of Bengal*, p. 58). In the earlier form *-auka*, it appears in *Jalauka*, a son of Asoka Maurya (V. A. SMITH: *Early History of India*, p. 191).

The suffix *-oka* > *-o* is preserved in modern Assamese current names ; e.g. *Nilo*, *Huro*, *Naro* (A. F. D. § 189).

*Indoka*, *Khāsoka* of the inscriptions seem to be respectively related to *Indra* and *Bodo khāso*, build anything across a road or a river.

(d) Two other endings are *-i*, *-t* (*t*): e.g. *Abañci* (X.23); *Orangitantra* (IX.24), a weaver named *Orangi*. Current Assamese has *-i* termination in personal names : e.g. *Anāthī*, *Bhadi*. *Orangi* seems related to Malayan *Orang*: Sant. *horo*, man. *-t* (*t*): *Bhijjata* (III.30); cf. Current As. names : *Bijit*, *Bāñcit*, *Bhābit*.

8. Two other names of historical and legendary fame seem to be of non-Aryan origin :

*Harjara Deva* (II); giver of grant no. II. He and the two other kings of his dynasty Vanamāla Deva and Bala Varmā, givers of grants nos. III and IV, with their capital at Hārūppeśvara, are said to have belonged to a *mlecca* dynasty. The name Harjara seems to be of Austric origin : cf. Sant. *hara*, hill; Austric *jurukrah*, *jukrah*, a chief, C 98 (see § 10).

## (B)

## PLACE NAMES

9. Place names owe their origin to association with lakes, rivers, trees or some striking natural characteristics or incidents that happened in the localities indicated. Similarly river names are associated with terms indicating noise, breaking, etc. The following list of place names has been arranged according to the serial number of the inscriptions rather than the alphabetical order in order to give an idea of the perspective of the time when they were recorded. Moreover words occurring in the same plate may throw some light upon one another's origin by semantic or sound association.

10. *Hārūppeśvara*, (II.14); seat of King Harjara and his descendants. Situated near the present town of Tezpur in the Darrang district. Supposed to be of Austric origin : cf. Sant. *hara*, hill; Austric *pau*, hill, H. 93 : also Sant. *harup*, to cover as with a basket or dish. Curiously enough, other towns of the same region seem to have Austric affiliations : *Tezpur*, Austric, *taju*, *tijo*, a snake, S 311. Sant. *tijo*, a creeping insect. *Darang*, a river and a district : cf. Austric *dorr*, bridge, B 391 ; *hong*, *ong*, W 29.

11. *Dijjinā* (IV.16); locality of the land granted by plate no. III. cf. Bodō *dija* (o), to melt ; *jini*, dirt.

*Heng-Sibā* (IV.26); place ; cf. Bd. *haing*, relation ; *sebai*, break.

*Koppā* (IV.33); place ; cf. Khas. *kop*, to cover ; Austric, *koi*, C 156.

*Diddesā* (IV.33); a tank ; cf. Bd. *di*, water ; *disai*, to sprinkle water.

*Sebā* (IV.33); a tank ; cf. Bd. *sebai*, to break.

12. *Kalangā* (VI.16); locality of land granted by plate no. VI in the present district of Nowgong. Associated with the name of a river called *Kalang*. cf. Austric *klong*, a noise, N 90.

*Diyambāra jola* (VI. 21); a tank ; cf. Bd. *diyungma*, flood ; *bara*, mouth of a river. *Jola* is a common term indicating natural tanks or lakes. cf. Khas. *jaw*, to leak ; *jaw-khalait*, bathed in tears ; Austric, *lao*, water, W 35 : Sant. *jola*, a shallow or marsh.

13. *Hapyoma* (VII.21); locality of land granted by plate no. VII. cf. Bd. *hap*, to penetrate ; *yao*, hand ; *ma*, suffix indicating biggishness.

‘*Koṣṭha-mākkhi-yāna* (VII.25) : a tank ; Skt. *koṣṭha*, a granary ; *yāna*, passage ; Bd. *makhao*, a thief : = “passage of the granary thief”.

*Makūti-mākkhi-yāna* (VII.25) ; also *Makuti-Kumyarā* (§ 14). cf. Austric *maku*, egg E 34 ; *tiong*, *ting*, egg-plant. Several Assamese names of plants with egg-like fruits begin with *māka-* : cf. *mākarīghilā*, *mākai*. In this connection cf. also Skt. *vātīga*, *vātinga*, brinjal.

*Dirgummā* (VII.25) ; a river ; cf. Bd. *dir*, river, *gu*, grass-hopper ; *ma*, suffix indicating biggishness. = “river of the big grass-hopper”.

14. *Mandi* (VIII.20). Locality of grant no. VII. cf. Bd. *mandu*, a hut in a cultivated field.

*Makuti Kumyarā* (VIII.26) ; a place ; cf. Bd. *khum*, flower, *yer*, to increase, multiply.

*Marka-myikokkha* (VIII.26) ; a place, cf. *markhu*, broken rice given as food to pigs : *miyaoba*, soft ; *khaokhu*, a ladle for cooking.

*Hāhārabi* (VIII.26) ; a tank : Bd. *ha*, place ; *raoba*, *raobi*, hard, firm ; *hāhāri*, frontier place.

*Pidaka-grāma* (VII.26) ; a place ; cf. Austric, *phādik*, to put or place upon. H 153b ; *ya-pidul* : *dayak*, village. H 153a, b.

15. *Olindāpakṛṣṭa-kañjiyā-bhiṭvi* (IX. 15) ; also *Olindāsameta* (IX.16). cf. Austric *wal*, deep hole in a stream ; *lien*, hole, H 109, 112 ; *du*, earth, E 12 ; Khas. *deu*, ground. *kañjiyā* seems to be related to Skt. *kañja* and *bhiṭvi* to *bhiṭhi* (see below : *bhallā-bhiṭhi*).

*Ora-coṣa* (IX.23) ; a natural tank. cf. Khas. *or*, to break into chinks, to crack ; Sant. *orec* to tear, to rend.

*Bhallā-bhiṭhi* (IX.23) ; *bhallā* seems to be related to Skt. *bhallāta*, a tree ; for *bhiṭhi*, cf. Sant. *bhiṭhā* outlying piece of cultivated high land. Modern Assamese has both *bhiṭhā*, *bheṭi* in the sense of a mound on which a house is erected. As a place name it indicates a colony : e.g. *barbhīṭhā*, the big colony : *kocar-bhiṭhā* the colony of the *koc* people ; *bhalā* as a place name occurs in *bhalā-guri*, in the district of Nowgong.

16. *Dig-dola* (X. 9) ; a village ; cf. Austric. *dik*, *deg*, house ; *dol*, place. H. 153.

*Nokka-debbari* (X.23); a place; cf. Bd. *no*, house: *nokhu*, eaves of a house; *deba*, *dubba*, thick (as jungle): *rai*, cane.

*Sobbađi* (X.23); a tank; cf. Bd. *sapba*, pure *di*, *de*, water.

*Camylā-joli* (X.23), a tank; cf. Bd. *sam*, grass, green food. *miyaolai*, a mongoose.

*Jaugalla* (X.23); a river; Bd. *jigalao*, a draw-net used in water too deep for fishing.

*Nekka-deuli* (X.23); a tank; Bd. *nekhe*, tip up; *dilim*, overflow.

*Dijjarati-hadī* (X.23); a river; Bd. *dija*, to melt; *hadī*, rains. The element *-rati* is unintelligible.

*Bekka* (X.23); a river; Austric *bekah*, to break into pieces. cf. Modern As. river name *beki*.

*Thaisa-dobbhi* (X. 23); a place; Bd. *thaisa*, lemon-fruit (*thai*, fruit); *dubba*, thick (as jungle). cf. As. *the-kerā*, Bg. *thai-kal*, a kind of lemon.

*Cūkko-jāṇa* (X.23); a place; cf. Austric *sek*, *seg*, fruit F. 170. *jenayoh*, tree; T 211. cf. Modern As. *cakalā*, a kind of lemon.

*Dija-makkā* (X.23) : a river; cf. Bd. *dija*, melt; *makhām*, cooked rice.

*Nokka-tadābhūmi* (X.23) ; a place; cf. Bd. *nokku*, eaves of a house.

17. Certain place names that seem to exhibit similar terminations may be considered together :

(a) *Pūraji* (X.23), locality of grant no. X.

*Krosañja* (IX.16), a village.

The -*j*- termination seems to suggest association of the place names with fruit trees. One Sanskritic place name is *lābu-kuṭi kṣetra* (V.16) "field of gourd". In *pūraji*, Skt. *pūra* is a citron tree, and *ji* may be affiliated to non-Aryan sources; cf. Md. *jo*, to bear fruit; Sant. *janhe*, millet; Khas. *jangew*, *jajer*, *jajew*, various kinds of vegetable plants; Austric *joho*, *jihu*. T. 211. As. *karac*, a kind of tree, approximates the sound of *krosa*.

(b) Another category of formations is with *bā(bha)*.

*Kūntabita-khambha-bā-satku...bhū* (VII.25). *Nokka-debbari-pāla gobā-bha bhoga alipāñā* (X.23).

*Nauku-bā sahasīmā* (III.34).

*bhabisā bhūmi* (VII.20, 25).

The -*bā-* in all these suggests shares or share-holders. Cf. Khas. *bhah*, share; Austric *ba*, G 34; *bebagi*, share; S 139. Sant. *bebosa*, share.

(c) In the plant name *kāśimbala(ā)*, indicating boundary, there is fusion of non-Aryan Khasi *ka*, a *śimul* tree, with Skt. *śim-*

bala. The plant *kāsimbalū* is current Assamese *kahimalā*. Another similar formation is *ođi-amma*, a tree = Mod. As. *uriām*. The term *ođi* is lexical Sanskrit, probably non-Aryan in origin and means " wild rice ". It exists in As. *uridhān*, wild rice. In *ođi-amma* (*āmra*), it seems to suggest a tree belonging to the same genus as the mango.

18. An apology is needed for the suggested derivations of the place names listed in this article. Even as it is, it is very difficult to find out any rationale behind place names, Aryan or non-Aryan, except where the names describe some striking characteristics or incidents known in history or legend. Explanation of place names resolves itself into isolating and etymologically identifying the component elements that go towards making up the names. When the names are composed of unintelligible elements of extra-Aryan languages whose linguistic peculiarities have not yet been fully explored, an attempt in this direction cannot proceed beyond tracing approximations of sound and sense. Explanations of this nature as ventured in this paper are anything but scientific, and yet a beginning has got to be made somewhere; and this article does not claim to be anything but a collection of raw materials. For suggested explanations of other place names of Assam, reference may be made to the present writer's publication, *Assamese, Its Formation and Development*, §§ 82-89.

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#### APPENDIX II

##### *Certain Austric-Sanskrit Word-Correspondences*

BY

B. KAKATI

1. Certain well-known Sanskrit words of unknown origin bear such striking resemblances in sound and sense to non-Aryan Austric forms that a comparison seems only too inviting. But

owing to lack of sufficient information about the earlier stages of the languages of the Austro-Asiatic group, a study of this nature cannot just now go beyond mere comparison in point of sound and sense.

The words examined are grouped under some common characteristic indexes and the most noted word has been placed at the head of each category.

2. *Kāyastha*, a scribe. The function and official status of the *Kāyastha* has been historically examined by Prof. P. V. KANE (*NIA*, 740-743; A note on the *Kāyasthas*). Its primary meaning is 'a writer' without any reference to caste (*Ibid.*). But though it is invariably associated with writing, there is nothing in the formation to show any connection with it. If looked upon as an OIA. Sanskrit word, its meaning would be something like "staying in the body" which is absurd in its usual connotation of a writer. Most probably it is a non-Aryan formation Sanskritised. Compare the following Austric parallels: *Khasi thoh*, to write or make a mark; *iathoh* to commit to writing, to make an account; *ka-thoh*, a mark, a spot; *ka-iathoh*, entry in writing; Austric *kawait*, to scratch; *koih*, to scratch, scrape: *S<sub>5a</sub>*. *Mund. tho, thuñi*, to hit the mark as an arrow; *Sant. khayot*, to scrape. An approximation to the sound and sense of *kāyastha* in all these languages of the Austric group may not be altogether fortuitous, and *Kāyastha* may well be a Sanskritisation of a non-Aryan formation like *kaiathoh*.

A few lexical Sanskrit words of undetermined origin with initial *ka-*, *kā-*, may be traced to the same sources. Against Skt. *karayī*, a kind of scaly fish, cf. Austric *kaa*, a fish, *F<sub>asim</sub>*; Khas. *doh-kha*, a fish: Skt. *kavana*, water, cf. Austric *a-wa'tom*, water, *W<sub>27</sub>*; Malayan *awan*, cloud: Skt. *kaśipu*, a bed pillow, clothing, cf. *Mund. sipi*, to rub the head; *Sant. sipot*, to squeeze in the hand; Austric *sapo*, slats of thatch: *sapu* *peningol*, a cap (*peningol* = head) *P<sub>100(1)</sub>*: Skt. *kāsara*, a buffalo, cf. Austric *kashak*, *kasak*, *ka-sa*, *sau*, a deer (*Sambara*) *D<sub>45</sub>*; Khas. *ka-sier*, a deer. In Assamese *kāc(s)ar* is a living word meaning a buffalo with long extended horns: Skt. *kaśika*, a mongoose, cf. *Mund. siku*, a louse; *Sant. sikric*, a mosquito. The initial *kā-* or its variants function as something like an article in some languages of the Austric group.

3. *Vāṅga*: ancient name of a part of the modern province of Bengal. It comprised the tract east of the Brahmaputra and north of the Padmā. A great deal of the delta was marshy and uninhabitable in the early period of Bengal history (*Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, p. 67). Kālidāsa refers to the

Vanga as "arrayed in a panoply of boats" (*nausādhanodyatān*; *Raghu*, IV, 36). As a Puranic name, Vanga meant both the people and their country. Various suggestions have been made about the origin of the word Vanga. Dr. N. N. Choudhury connects it with Tibetan *bans*, marshy or moist (P. L. Paul: *Early History of Bengal*, Vol II, p. V). Jnanendra Mohan Das in his Bengali Dictionary connects Vanga with Santali *Bonga*, a spirit, Bengal being supposed to have been originally inhabited by the Santali people. Alongside these suggested derivations, the following Austric formations may also be considered: *le-bong*, sea (*le* = water) S<sub>22</sub>; *mami-bong*, belly, hole, H<sub>110</sub>; *bong*, mouth, M<sub>202</sub>; *lu-bong*, cave, H<sub>111</sub>; *boang*, to dig up, D<sub>107</sub> (v). In all these formations *bong* has reference to some sort of physical depression or cavity and may be looked upon as describing the water-locked condition of the region. In Assamese, *bong* is a common word for a natural spring or channel in a cultivation field.

If the sound similarity be pushed further, ancient *Anga* and *Kalinga* may be equated to Austric *ang*, to gape, M<sub>199</sub>; *Khas*, *ang*, to open the mouth; and to Austric *kling*, noise, respectively. In Assam there is a river named *Kalang* which may be equated to Austric *klong*, noise.

#### 4. -śrī as a suffix after river names.

In the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī Tantra*, both devoted to giving topographical accounts of early Assam, certain river names contain the suffix -śrī: e.g. *Dhana-śrī*, *Svarṇa-śrī* (popularly called -*siri*). There is also a Tāntric Piṭha called *Śrī-haṭṭa* which gives the name to the present district and town of *Sylhet* on the Surmā river in Eastern Pakistan. *Śrī-haṭṭa* is popularly called *Silhat*. Against *śrī*, *sur*, cf. Austric *serong*, *serokn*, a hole, a cave D<sub>10</sub>; *Mund*. *Sant*. *sira-soro*, to flow as from a channel; *Khas*, *shlei*, to flow. In *Boḍo di-sor*, to flow; *sor*, to crawl as a snake; *sor* is a loan word from Austric (*Boḍo di* = water). In *Surmā*, the Bd. suffix, -*mā* indicates biggishness. *Śrī-haṭṭa* = a fair on the river side.

#### 5. *Saumāra* (cf. also *Sung-Sumāra*, the country of the Bhaggas).

In the *Purāṇa* and the Tantra referred to above, the eastern portion of early Assam is called *Saumāra*, which is obviously a lengthened form of *Sumāra*. Ancient *Saumāra* is described as having been bounded on all sides by rivers (*Yoginī Tantra*: 2/1/47-48). About its probable derivation, the following formations may be compared: *Khas. sum*, to bathe, Austric *semir*, turbid water, W<sub>25</sub>; *Mund*. *Sant*. *Khas. um*, water.

6. *Haya-grīva* (cf. also *haya-medha*, *haya-tāmra*, *haya-bar*).

In the Purāṇas, Haya-grīva is the name of an Asura. It is also the name of an incarnation of Viṣṇu who killed Haya-grīva, having assumed the form of the Asura so named. There is a temple near Gauhati (Assam) consecrated to Haya-grīva Mādhava. Haya-grīva is usually translated as "horse-necked" (Skt. *haya* = horse). But the form *haya-* occurs in the Yoginī Tantra as the first element of several compound words indicating locality, cf. *haya-medha*, name of a mountain (*Ibid*: 2/6/87); *haya-tāmra*, name of a place (*Ibid* 2/1/49). Another place-name in Assam is *haya-bar*. It would appear that *haya* is a non-Aryan formation = red; cf. Khas. *hain-hain*, very red; Austric *muhum*, *aham*, *ham*, blood. B<sub>245</sub>: *to-han*, *to-hāñ*, *to-hui*, red, R<sub>1</sub>; Mund. *hao-mui*, a large red ant (*mui* = ant). Thus it would appear *haya-grīva* = having a red neck.

## APPENDIX, III

*Musical Instruments*

Music was developed greatly in Assam, as in other parts of India. During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, we witness a new religious revival associated with the Bhakti movement. This revival was broadcast from one end of the province to the other by songs, music and plays.<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara Deva and Mādhava Deva, two of the Vaiṣṇava apostles of the new movement, were responsible for establishing various *Satras*<sup>2</sup> similar to early Buddhist monasteries, and Nāmaghāras or common prayer houses in villages.

Each Nāmaghara has a band of *Gāyan-Bāyan*, an orchestral party, organised by the musical-minded people of the village. The head of the party, known as the *Gāyan*, generally coaches the young boys so that their services may be available for the village *Gāyan-Bāyan* party when an occasion arises. Besides religious music, there is also secular music associated with social ceremonies like *Biyā* (marriage) and *Bihu* (popular festivals). The party which provides instrumental music on such occasions is known as *Dhuliyā-Khulipā*.

1. B. K. Barua, *Ankiā Nat*, Intro., pp. 1-14.

2. *Assamese Malters, Past and Present*, C.R. XLIII, pp. 50-53; Eliot, *Hinduism in Assam*, op. cit.; Satyendranath Sarma, *A Brief Survey of the Vaisnavite Satra Institutions of Assam*, J.U.G., Vol. II, No. 1.

Many of the musical instruments that we see to-day seem to have come down from early times. This is revealed from the very many sculptural carvings of the period under review. A study of the instruments seen depicted on the monuments brings up a number of interesting points about their use and the ideas of music in general of the Assamese people.

These musical instruments are usually classified under *tata-yantra*, comprising all stringed instruments, *ghana-yantra*, comprising cymbals, gongs, bells, etc., *ānaddha-yantra*, comprising all instruments covered with skins, such as drums, tabors, etc.; and *sūṣira-yantra*, comprising wind instruments of all kinds. Among the *tata-yantras*, the *Vīṇā* seen in the hands of Sarasvatī (Figs. 67-68)) is a one stringed instrument. Such *Vīṇā* or *Bīṇ* is a common instrument played even to-day by wandering mendicants. Another popular variety is called *Lāo Tokārī*. This is made by stretching a skin across a gourd (*lāo*) which provides an air-chamber. Other stringed instruments enumerated in early Assamese literature are *Bipañci*, *Dotorā* (two stringed), *Karilāsa*, *Rudra Vilāsa*, *Vilāsa* (probably different varieties of the same instrument), *Rudravīṇā*, *Rāmarīṇā*, *Rudraka Tokārī*, *Ravāra*, *Sārindā*, a kind of violin.

Cymbals, known as *Tāla*, are of all sizes, and are used for different purposes according to their sweetness and depth of tone. The larger and thinner, the dinner-plate variety, is known as *Rāmatāla* or *Bhoṭa-tāla*, probably a reminder of its association with *Bhoṭa-deśa*. It is chiefly used in connection with music of a religious character, and forms an integral part of the music played by the *Gāyan-Bāyan* party. A variety of *Kara-tāla* is made of split bamboo (like castanets) and generally used in Vaisnavite music. The small-sized cymbals have various names, such as *Khañjari*, *Khañjarikā*, *Khutī-tāla* and *Mandirā*. Popular music is rarely divorced from the accompaniment of cymbals.

Besides, there are various types of gongs or *Kāh*, usually made of hammered malleable metal, flat or approximately flat in form, and are struck by hand with a soft mallet. The bigger size is referred to in the early literature as *Bara-Kāṅkha* (modern *Bar-Kāh*). *Jhañjara* or *Jhoñjara* and *Jhañjhirkā* are gongs used in war for giving signals.

Associated with these is *Ghanṭā* or bell which has a long association with Hindu worship. Here also should be mentioned the little ankle-bells known as *Kinkini* tied by dancers round their ankles. They produce a faint clasping sound as the feet move in

steps,<sup>3</sup> which mingles not unmusically with the dance music or songs which accompany the dance; and they not only serve to mark the time, but to keep the dancer or singer in perfect accord with the musicians.

Among the ānaddha-yantra, the drum takes the first rank; and it is one of our most important musical instruments.<sup>4</sup> Rowbatham in formulating the stages through which instrumental music has passed, according to a development theory as applied to music, considers that the drum first responded to the nascent conception of music in the prehistoric man, and has since been tenaciously preserved as an adjunct to religious service.<sup>5</sup> The types of drum used in Assam are many, and consequently it has many names corresponding to its size, shape and the material with which it is made. The bigger size drums are called *Dāmā* or *Dāmānā*, *Gomukha*, *Kahāla* or *Kahāli*, *Nāgārā* and *Paṭaha*. *Bherī*, *Daṅkā*, *Daṇḍima*, *Dundubhi*, *Jayaḍhāka*, *Rāmabherī* are military musical instruments<sup>6</sup>. *Dabā* (kettle-drum) is another large drum, used in the service of temples and Nāmagharas. It has sometimes two sides and looks like a big casket. Such drums are beaten with two sticks. The *Dabā* of a temple or Namaghara, even to-day, serves many purposes of the village. Primarily it is sounded to bespeak of the time of prayer and to summon the devotees to service. It also works as a time-marker like the church-bell. It is generally believed that its sound has beneficent power, which drives away evil spirits. During natural disturbances, such as hailstorm, earthquake, fire and so forth, the *Dabā* is sounded to make the villagers alert. *Mṛdaṅga* is one of the most ancient of India's ānaddha-yantra. As its name suggests, its body was originally made of clay. At present, it consists of a hollow shell of wood, larger at one end than at the other, and upon which are stretched two heads of skin, fastened to wooden hoops and strained by leather braces interlaced and passing the length of the *Mṛdaṅga*.

3. Kinkini śavada vaidya śuna ruṇa ruṇa | Mādhava Kandali,  
Rāmāyana, Laikā Kānda.

4. A. J. Hipkins: *Musical Instruments, Historic, Rare and Antique*, pp. 87 ff.

5. *History of Music*, Vol. I.

6. Kāhāli muhori bherī śavada tumula |

Dundubhi mṛdaṅga dāmā bāje ḍhāka dholā || Mādhava Deva,  
Rāmāyana, Adikānda.

Avādayanta te sāṅkhān paṭahān pariruddinah |

Mṛidaṅgāndinālīmāṇiscaivā gomukhān paṇardīstathā ||

Kālikā Purāna, Chap. VI, V. 40.

It is beaten by the hands and finger-tips. *Mṛdaṅga* forms the main instrument of *Gāyan-Bāyan*. The early literature makes abundant references to women playing on *Mṛdaṅga*. Its modern variety is called *Khola*. Smaller drums are known as *Anaka*, *Dambāru*, which play an important role in early iconography as the instrument of *Siva*, *Dhola* or *Dholuka*, *Khumuci*, a kind of one-faced drum of conical shape, and *Mādala*. The drums seen in the Tezpur panel (Fig. 20) are shorter drums, known as *Dhola* or *Dholaka* which is an inferior instrument, mostly used in folk music and by the *Dhuliyā-Khuliyā* orchestral party. *Dhola* is played on either by hands or with sticks or by both.

The earliest wind-instrument used by the people was probably *Śīṅgā*, the horn or the trumpet. They are chiefly made of buffalo horns, and have many names according to their use, as *Khan Śīṅgā*, *Rāma Śīṅgā*, and *Rāja Śīṅgā* (war trumpet). *Śīṅgā* is blown not only for mundane but also for ritual purposes. Among some of the hill peoples of the province blowing of the horn becomes a common method of driving off demons, or of producing magical results. The *Gāros*, in cases of sickness, blow the horn to drive away evil spirits which they believe cause it.<sup>7</sup> *Śaikha* or the couch-shell is another very ancient instrument, being associated with *Viṣṇu*, and is blown in performing many a domestic rite. *Vāhi* or *Muruli* (the reed flute) is one of the common instruments in the musical tradition of India.<sup>8</sup> *Vāhi* occupies a dignified place in Indian music, as the instrument par excellence in the hands of *Kṛṣṇa* (Fig. 66). The left figure in the third pair in the Tezpur panel (Fig. 20) is very interesting, as it plays a double pipe. Banerji identifies it as a conch-shell, but it looks more like a *Kāliyā* or *Kāli*, a kind of clarionet. There are several varieties of this instrument, namely *Jaya Kāli*, *Kāliyā*, and *Vira Kāli*. *Pēpā*, something like Pan's pipe, and *Mahari*, are other wind instruments which are a normal accompaniment of the Bihu dance. *Gaganā* or *Gamanā* is a kind of Jew's harp, and even now a very common musical instrument among the hill people.<sup>9</sup>

*Mādhava Kandali* (13th century A.D.) in his Assamese version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* gives an elaborate list of musical instru-

7. Playfair; *The Garos*, p. 91.

8. P. Sambamoorthy, *The Flute*, pp. 24 ff.

9. Young mentions that the most elaborately made and best sounding Jew's harp has been found in Sadiya, Assam. A. W. Young, *The Jew's Harp in Assam*, J. Pro. A.S.B., IV, NS), pp. 223-37. For a description of the instrument see *The Lakhers* by N. E. Parry, p. 185.

ments.<sup>10</sup> Another Assamese poet Sūryakhari Daivajñā in his *Darrang Rāja Vansśāvalī* enumerates some of these instruments. Besides the instruments noted above, the early Assamese texts refer to such instruments as *Bhāmari*, *Bhāṇḍi*, *Benā*, *Benī*, *Bhemeci*, *Dāṇḍi*, *Dīṇḍi*, *Docari*, *Dhomaci*, *Macuvai*, *Muruyā*, *Panava*, *Remaci*, *Śingavāna*, *Takī*, *Tavalā*, *Tupeci*, *Tūrya*, etc. This list illustrates the richness of Assamese musical instruments.

10. *Vira dhāka dhola bāje tavala dāgara dāṇḍi sāvada jūniya kujdhala  
Bhemeca kṣaimaca caya jhdjhara remaci bāje rāmatāla dru karatāla |  
Tokāri kendārā, rudra bipānci dotara bāje vīnā rāsi dobari moheri |  
Jijirā kāhālli singd bheri dāke nirantrara svarga bhuvanako galla puri |  
Mādhavakandali, Rāmāyana, Kīṣkinḍha.*



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[Abbreviations used are—co. (country); dist. (district); h. (hill), k. (king); m. (mountain); p.n. (place name); r. (river); tr. (tribe); vill (village).]

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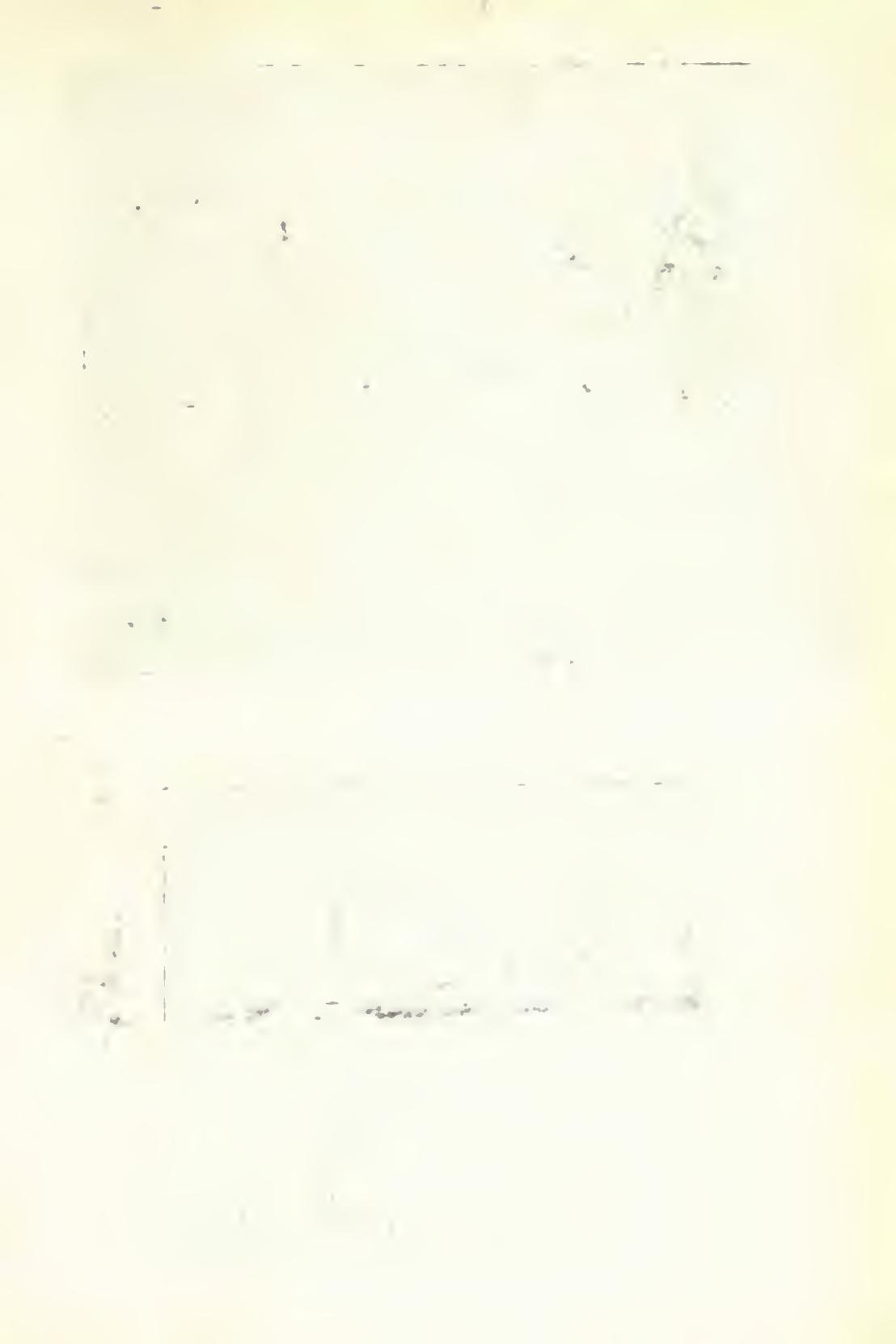
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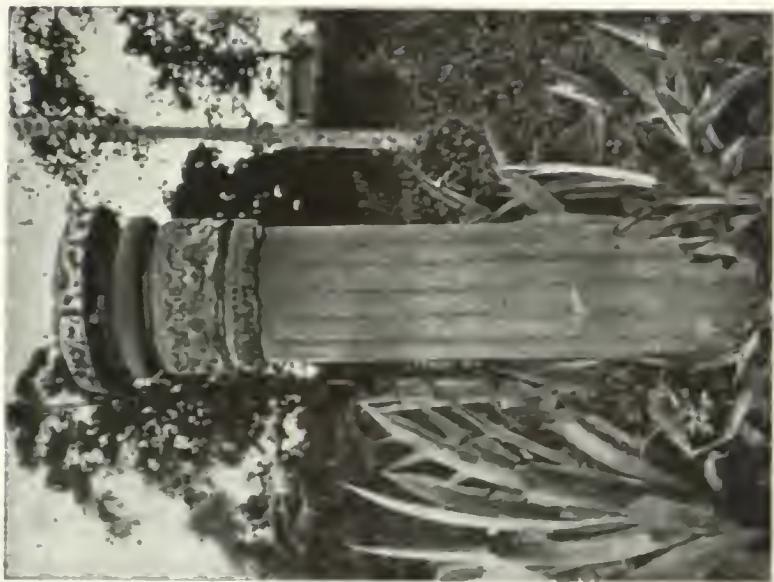


















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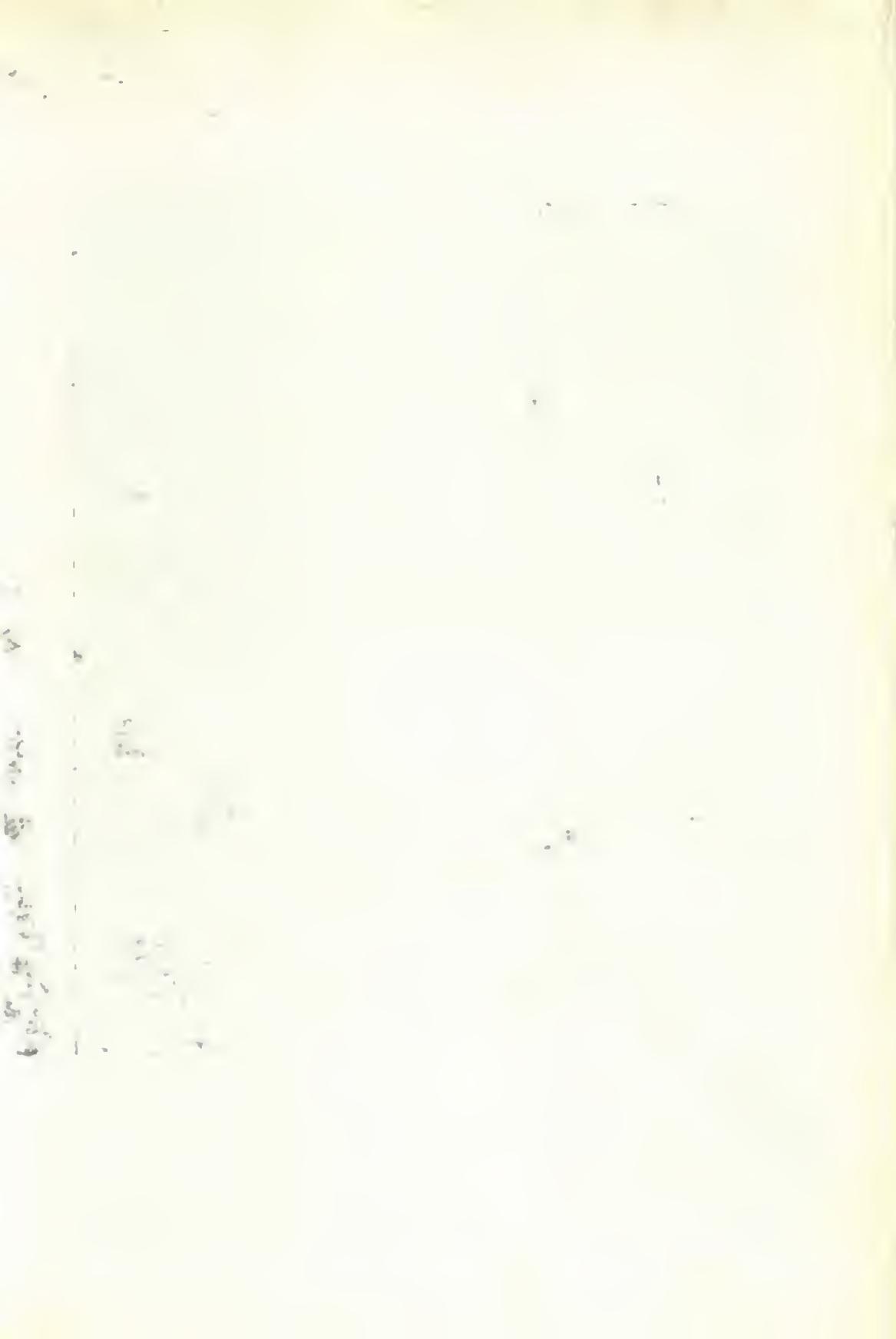


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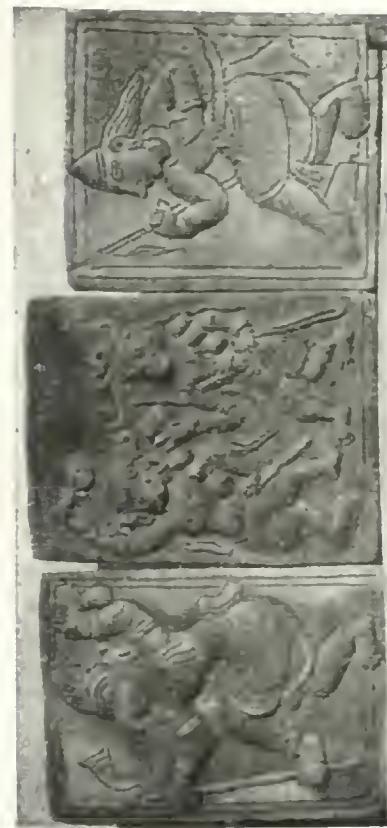




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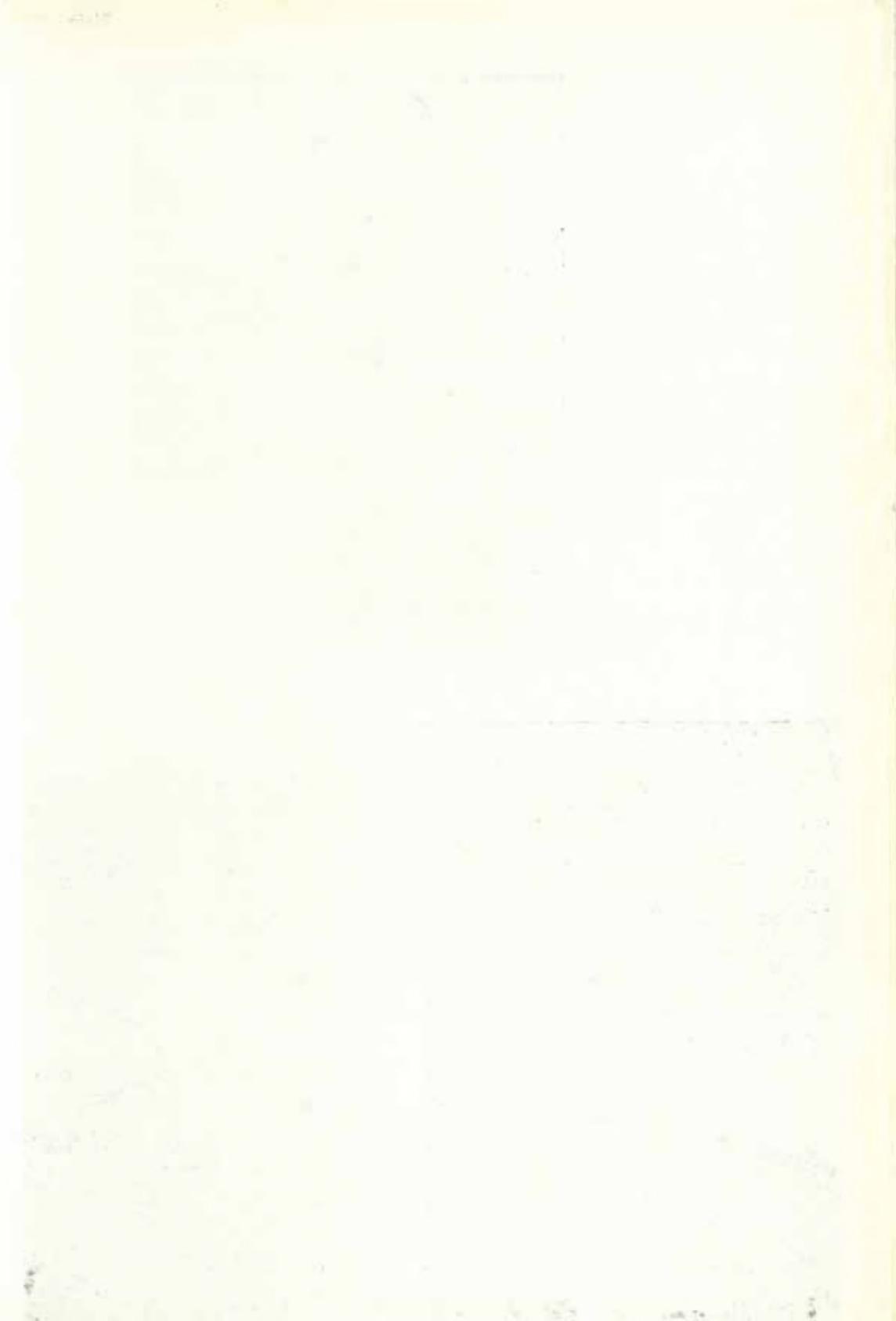


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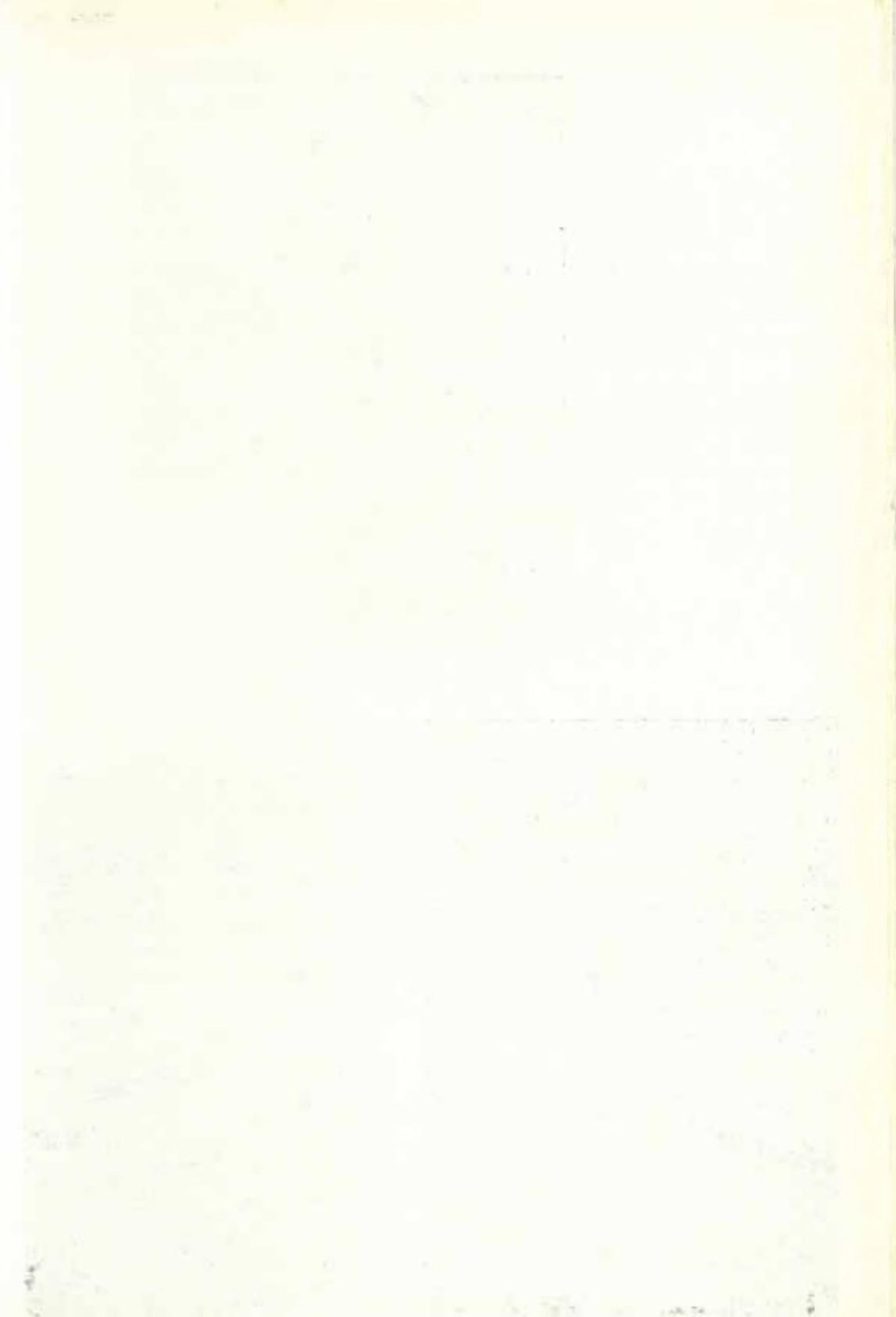


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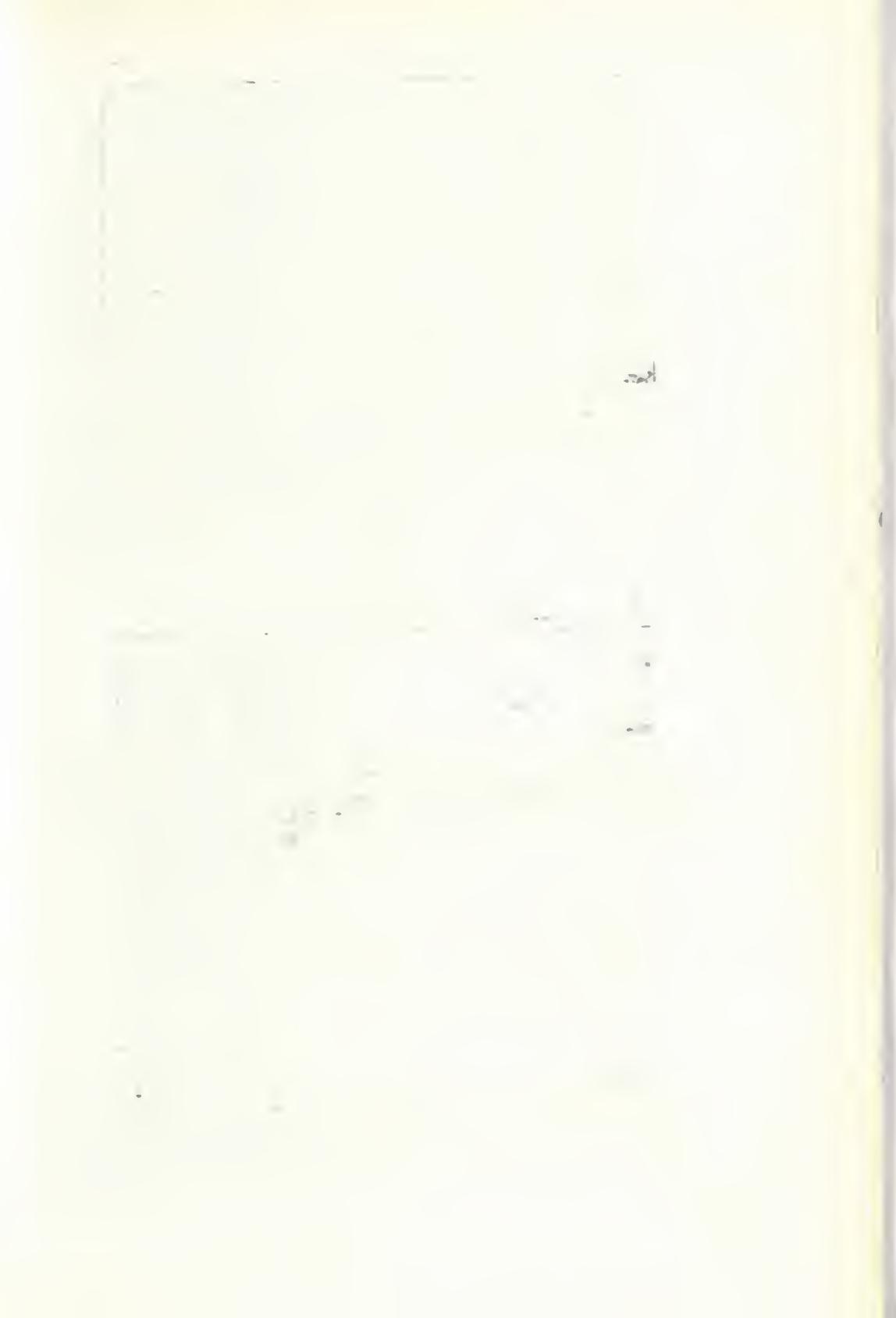


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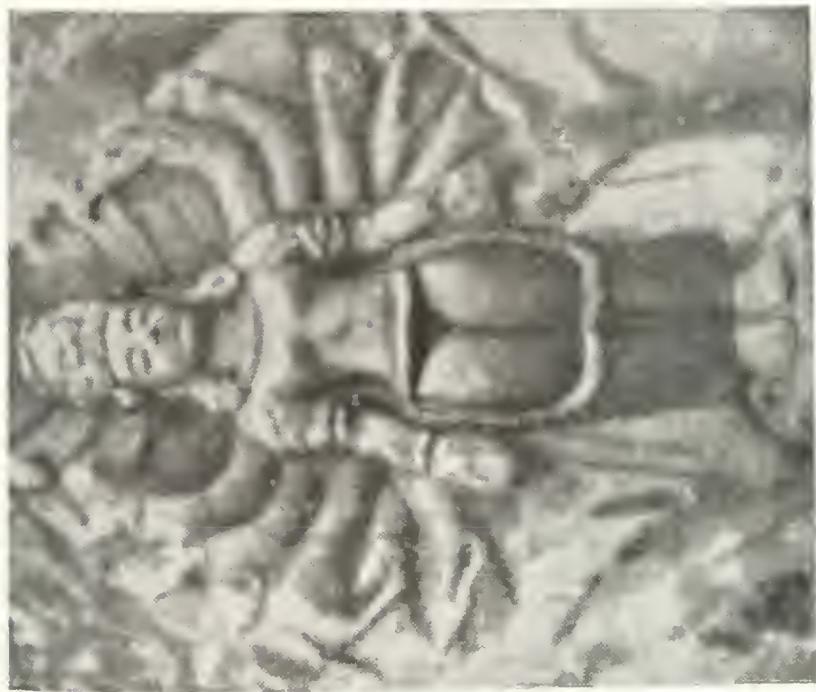
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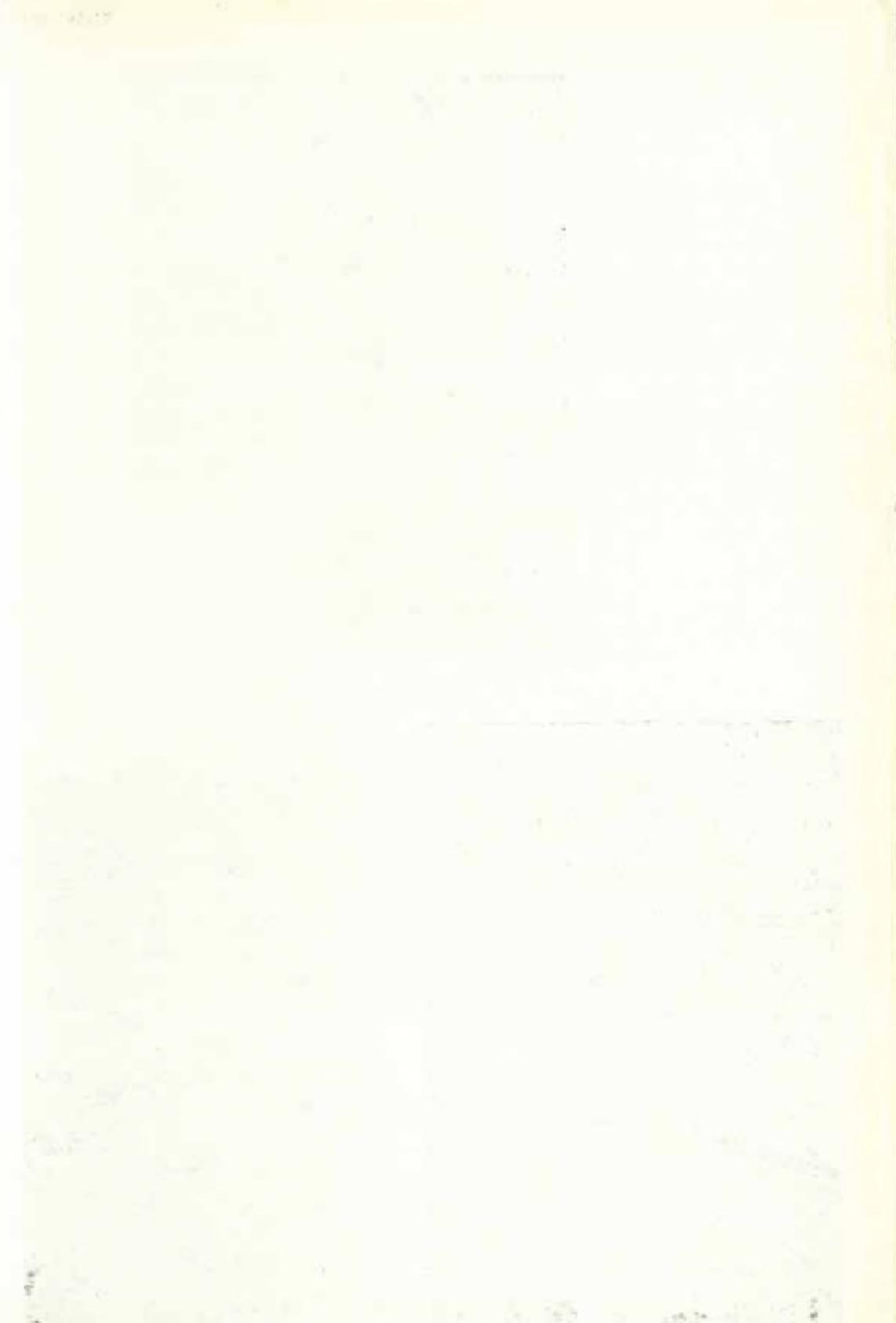


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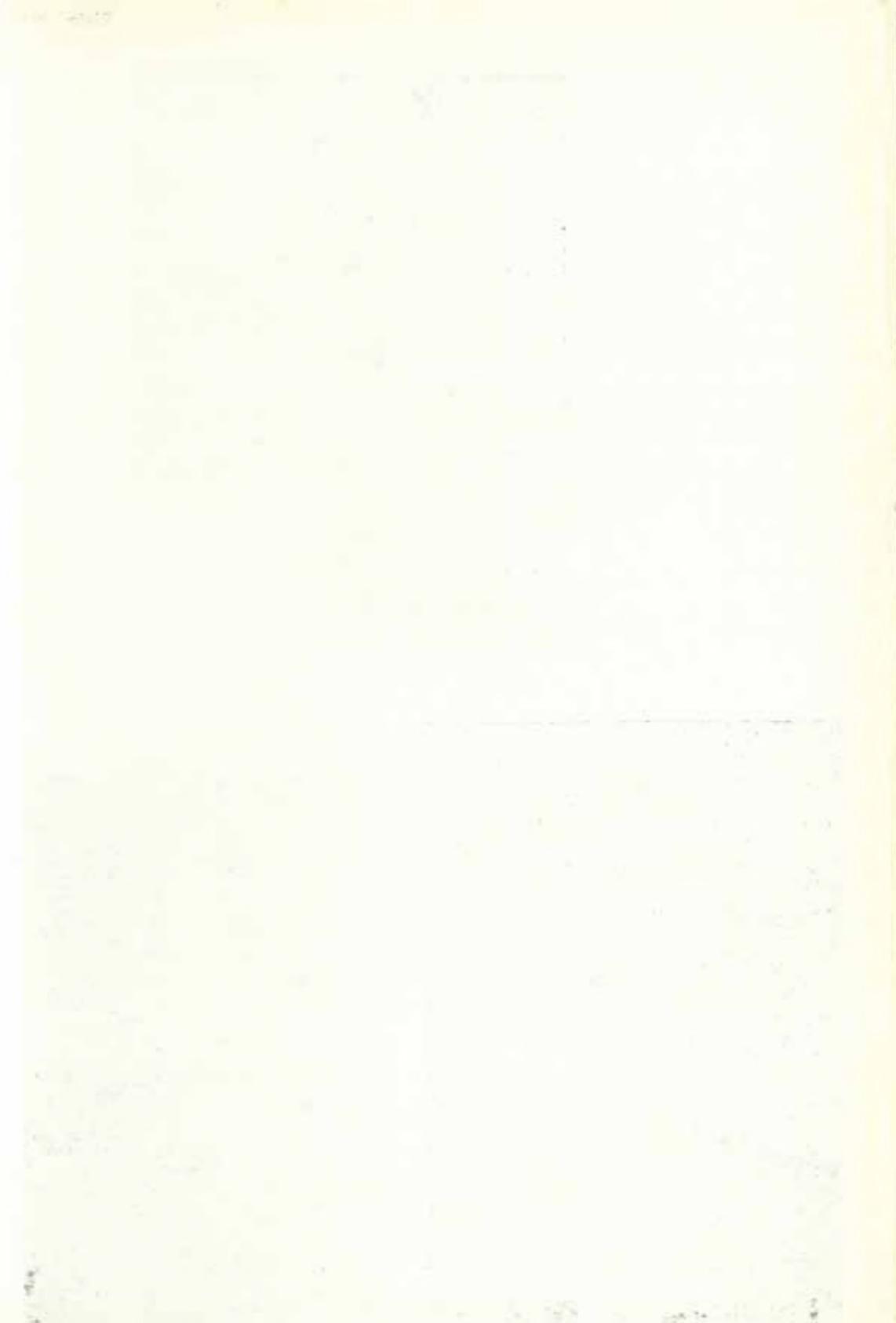


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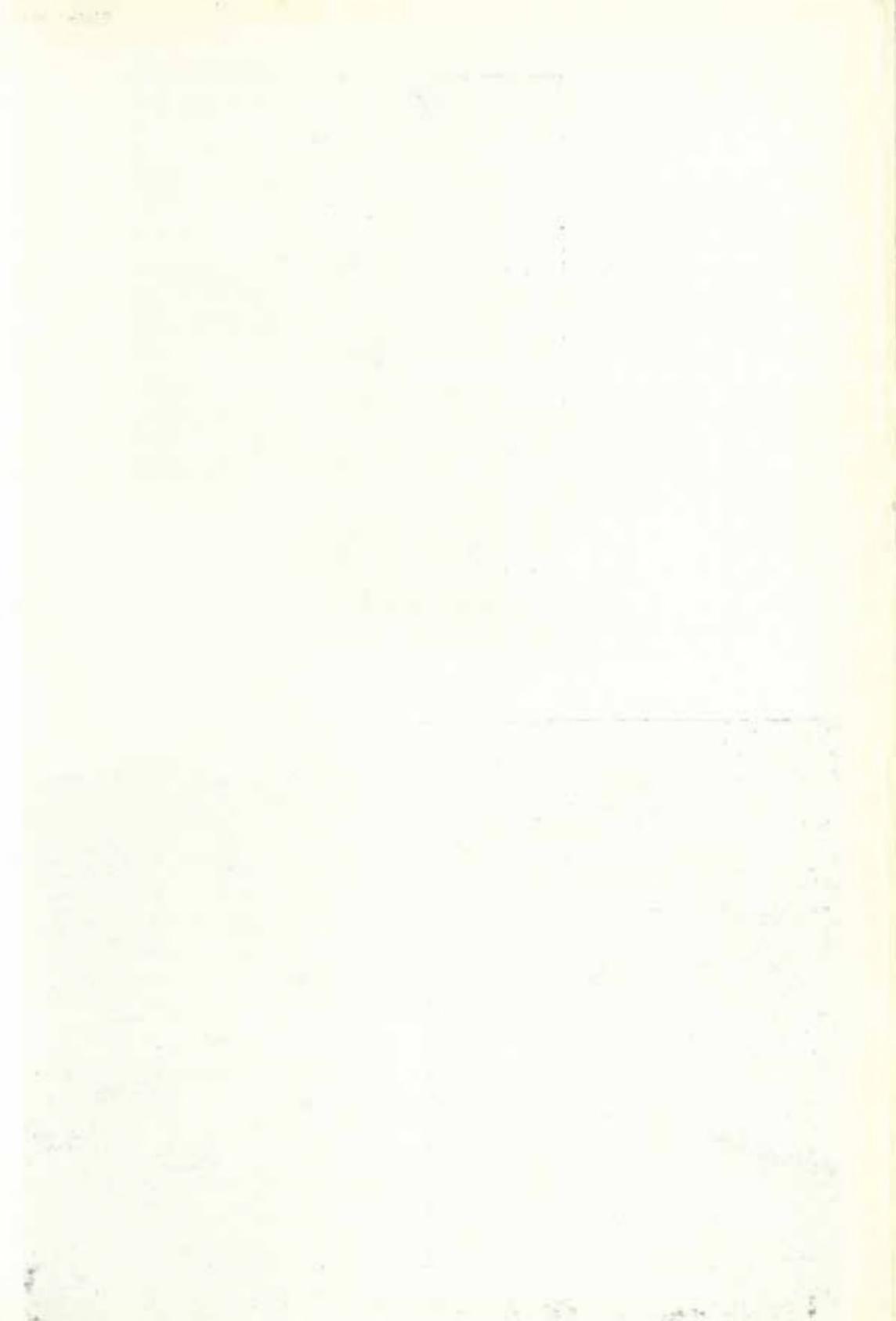


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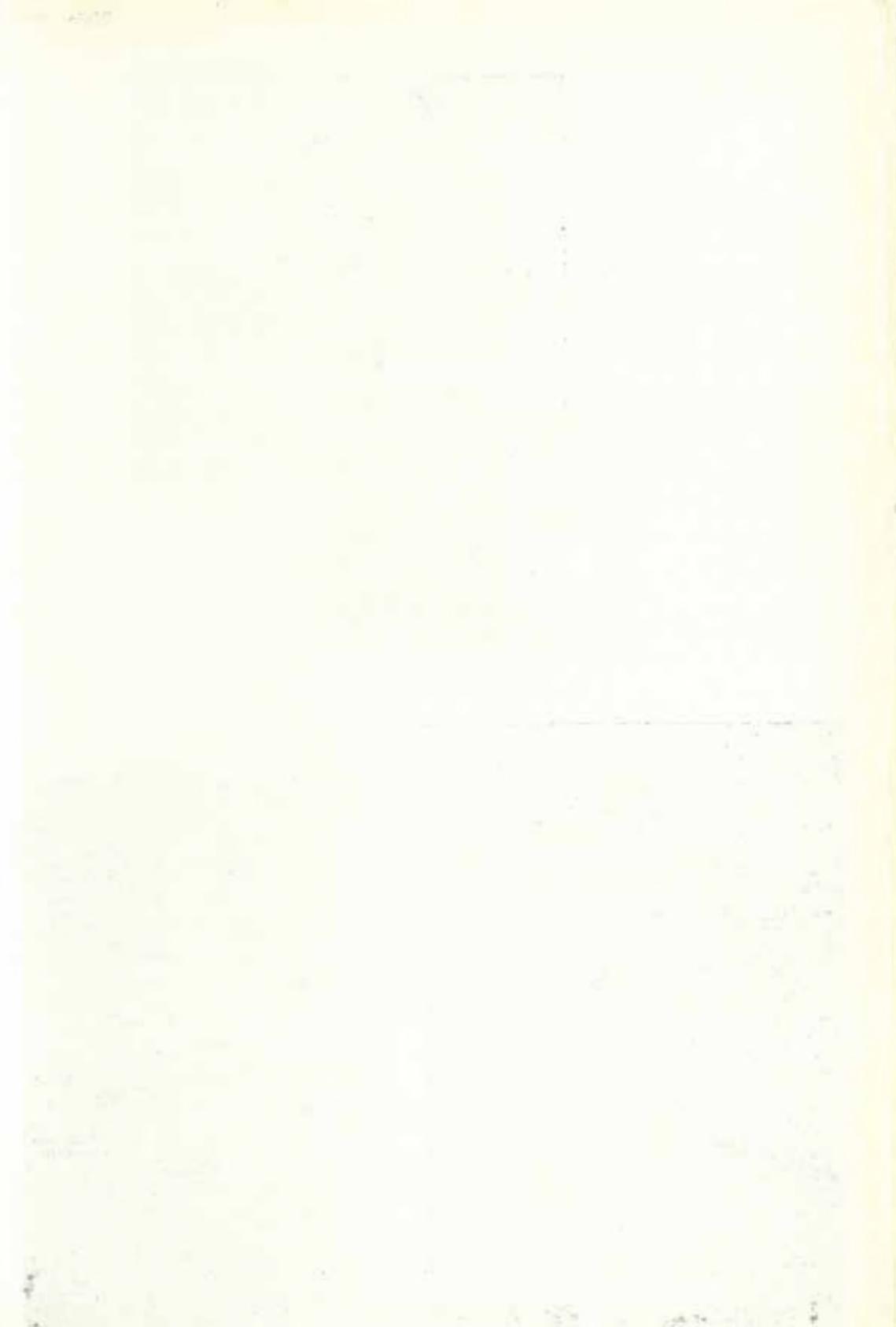
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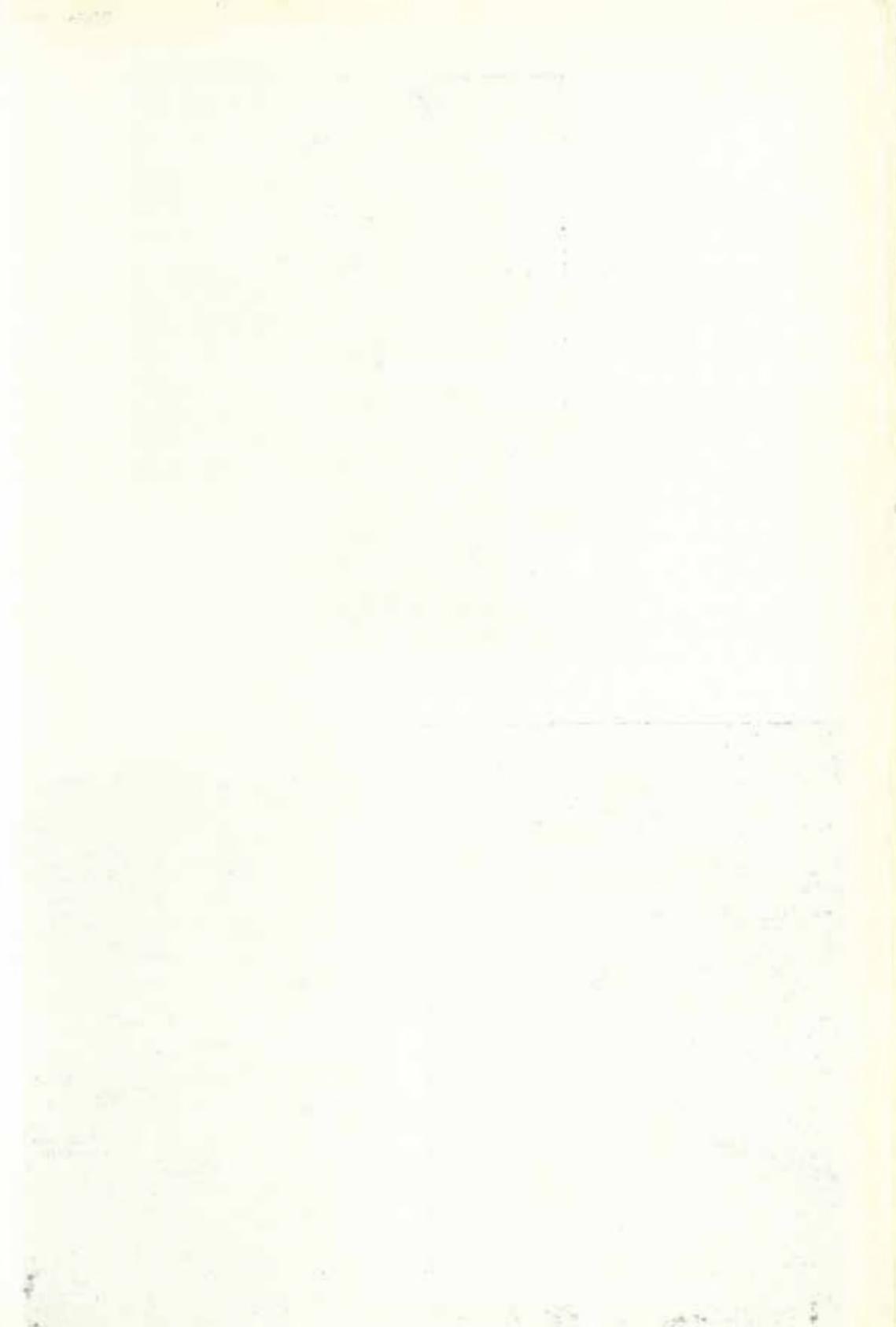


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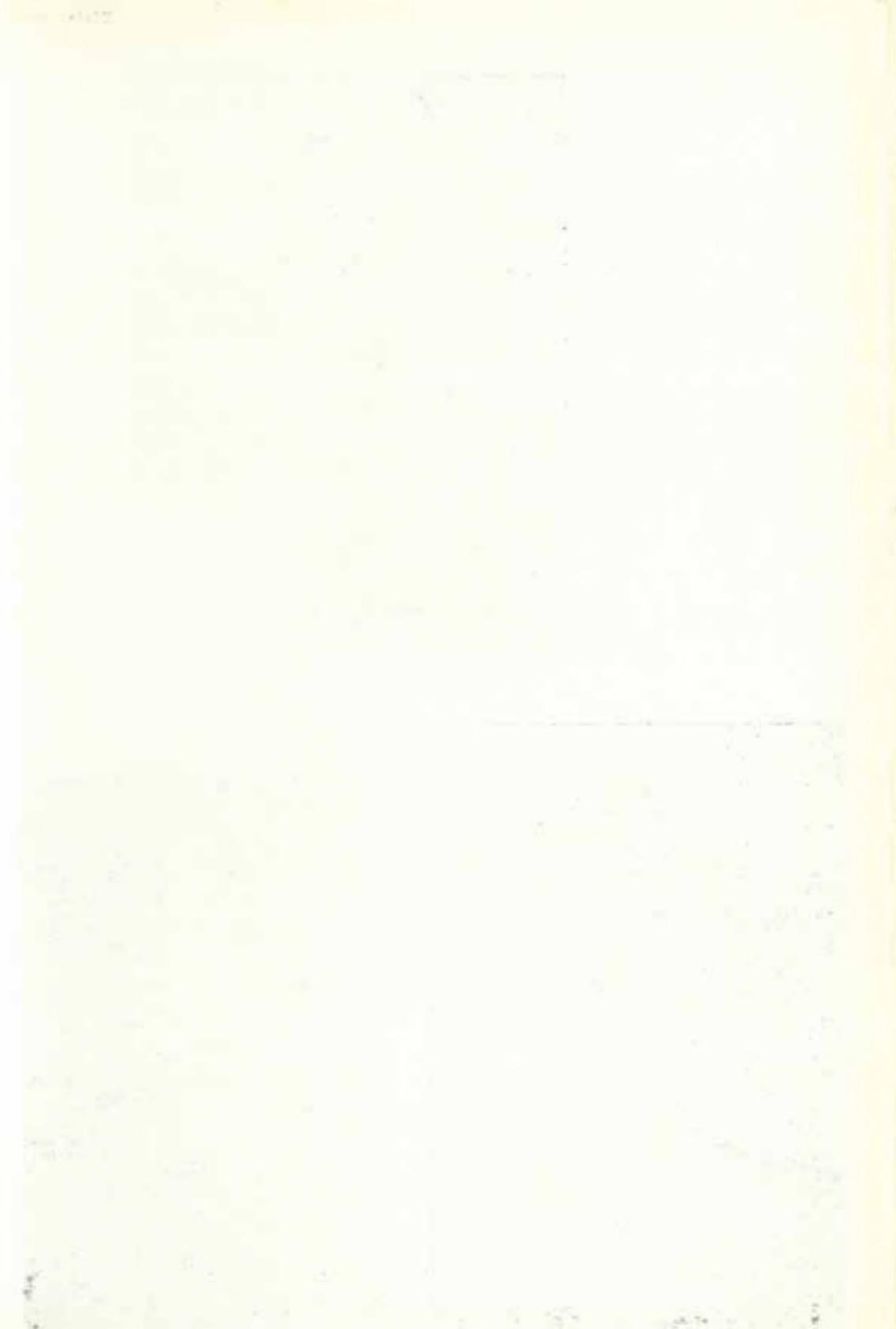


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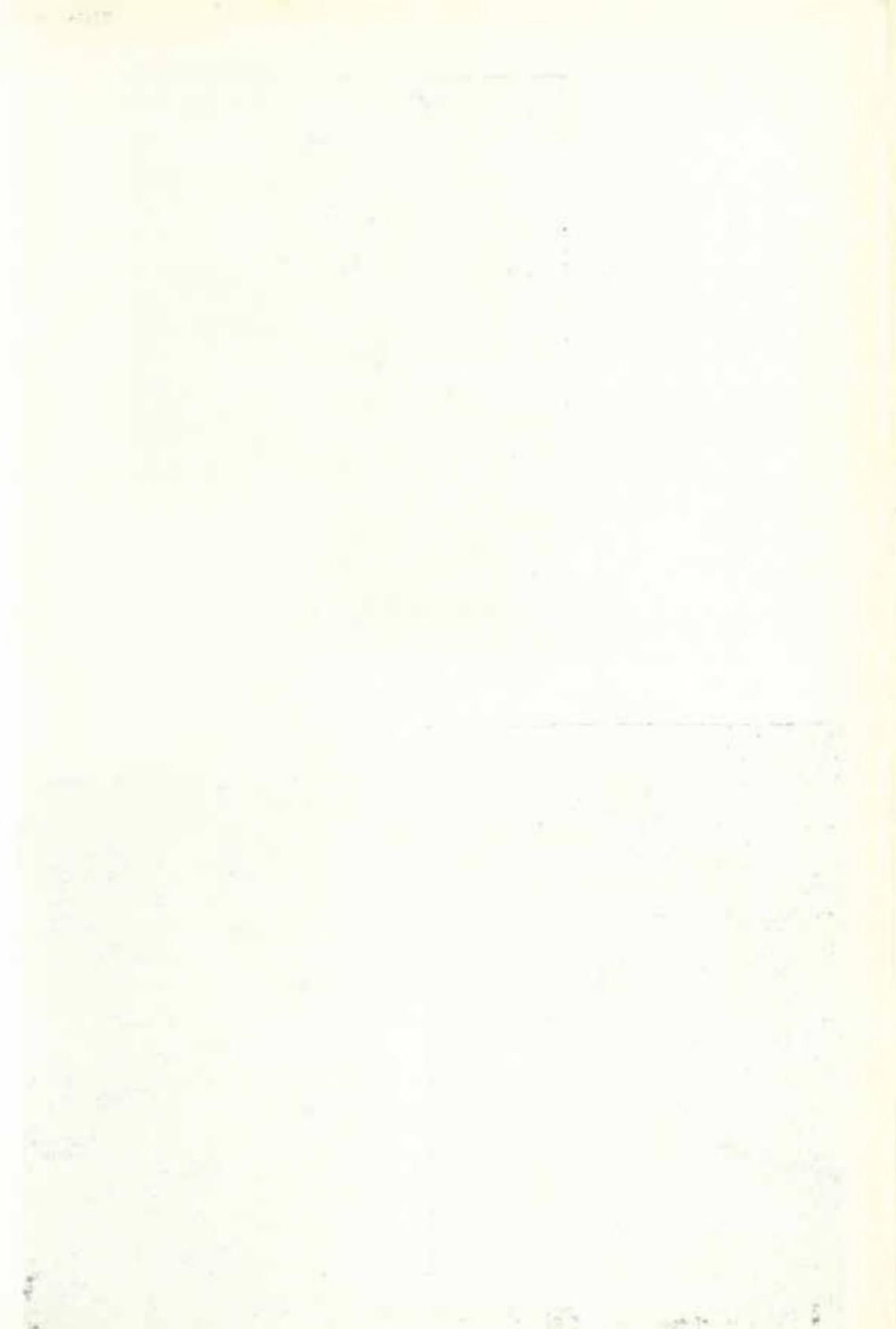


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A S S A M

92° E

93°

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95°

96° E

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B H U T A N

Dai-Para Frontiers  
Tract, Lachung

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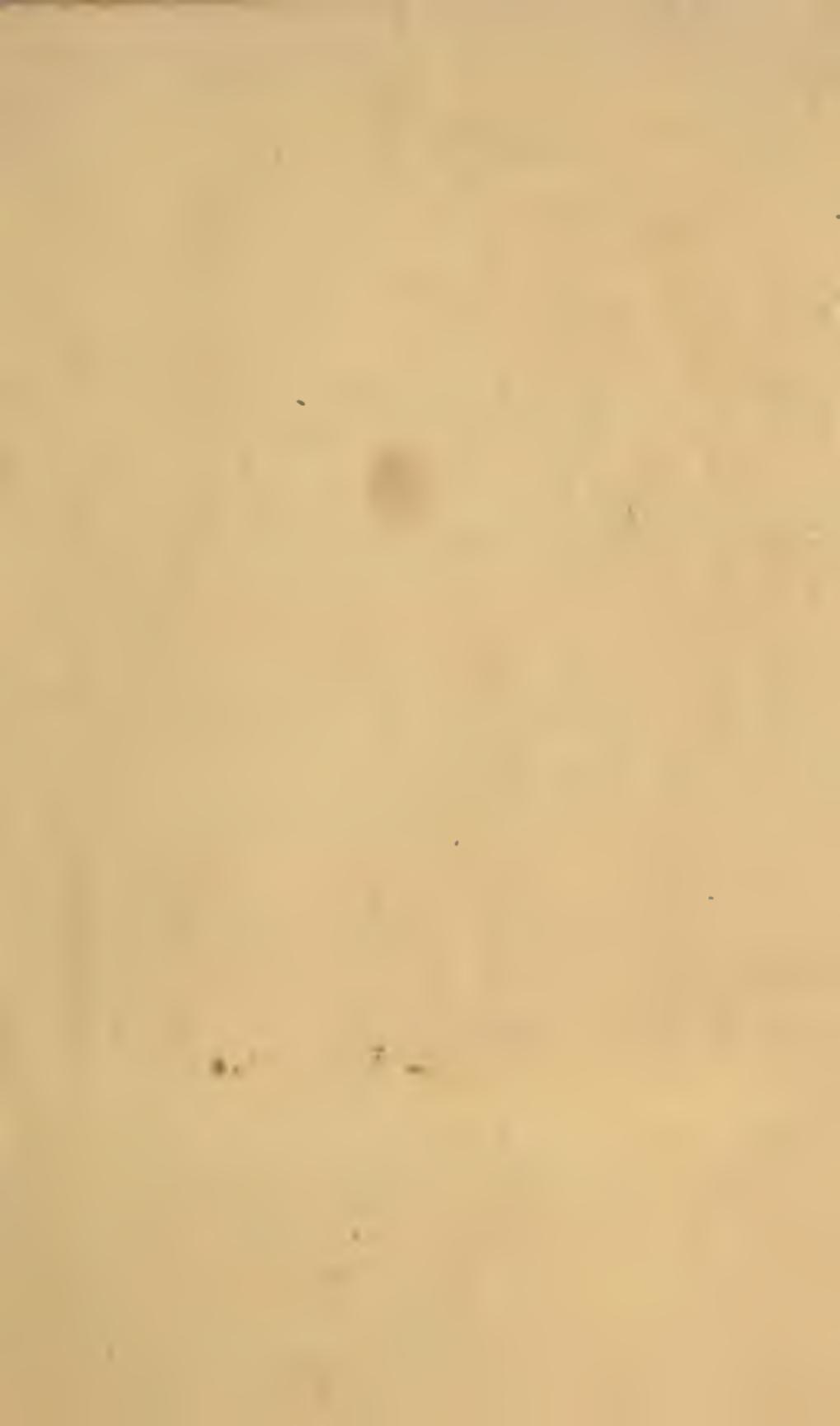
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